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POPE JOHN PAUL II ON INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

**Edited by
Sebastian Painadath**

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Pope John Paul II on Inter-Religious Dialogue

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Editorial

Pope John Paul II has left behind a great legacy in the Catholic Church. A unique aspect of this legacy is the promotion of a culture of inter-religious dialogue. Though coming from the Catholic Poland with hardly any contact with believers of other religions, John Paul developed a keen sensitivity to the great World Religions right from the beginning of his papacy. He cordially received delegations of other religious communities which came to Rome. In his visits to the local Churches worldwide, he consistently put on the agenda a friendly meeting with representatives of other religions.

The Prayer Meeting at Assisi in 1986 has been a historical event. That the head of the Catholic Church takes the initiative to invite the spiritual leaders of other religions to come together to pray for peace in the world was something unimaginable till 1960s. This prayer at Assisi made a significant spiritual contribution to the collapse of the *wall* that divided Europe – and the world – for over four decades. It also set in motion a new culture of inter-religious harmony in the attitudes of the Catholic Church to other religions.

The respect with which the Pope knelt at the *samadhi* of Mahatma Gandhi, the devotion with which he entered the synagogue in Rome and the mosque in Lebanon, the openness with which he met the spiritual heads of other religions, the concern with which he spoke out against the US war on the Islamic Iraq, the honesty with which he asked pardon for the Church's *sin* against respect for sisters and brothers of other religions and cultures – all that shows that he lived what he taught: "We should have a great respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills." (Red. Miss. 56).

John Paul considered the promotion of dialogue as "part of the Church's evangelizing mission" (Red. Miss. 55). Dialogue is not just a preparation for proclaiming the Gospel, nor is it motivated towards

conversion work. Dialogue has its own theological significance and practical dynamics. "By dialogue we make God present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we open ourselves to God." (Madras, Feb. 1986) With this *sacramental* character inter-religious dialogue truly becomes "the new way of being the Church." (Paul VI. Eccl. suam, 63).

The II Vatican Council recognized that believers of other religions do attain salvation. (LG. 16). But the Council did not explicitly say that other religions could be ways of salvation. John Paul seems to go a step forward. "Inter-religious dialogue is at its deepest level a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity." (Rome, Nov. 1992). When genuine dialogue takes us to this deeper soteriological level, we realise that "the differences are a less important element, when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive." (Rome, Dec. 1986).

Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and his team have been making a significant contribution to help the Pope broaden the theological perspectives of the Church on dialogue. Recalling the role of the Holy Father he wrote: "Pope John Paul II most certainly lived up to his commitment to serve the non-Christian world generously." (L'Osserv.Rom. 21.05.2005)

This issue of *Jeevadhara* is a tribute to Pope John Paul II who tried to promote a culture of inter-religious dialogue world-wide. Theologians explore the contributions the Pope made in relating to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and primal religions. Reflections are also offered on his basic theological perspectives on dialogue and mission. The future historians will call John Paul II as the *Pope of Inter-religious Dialogue*.

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A thematic collection of the sayings of John Paul II on Inter-religious dialogue can be found in: *Jeevadhara*, May, 1998, pp. 167-185

John Paul II and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Felix A. Machado

Felix Machado, the Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican, reflects on what Pope John Paul II meant for the functioning of this Vatican decastery. By changing the name Secretariat for *Non-Christians* to the Pontifical Institute for *Interreligious Dialogue* the Pope showed evidence for his sensitivity to the feelings of believers of other religions. He took personal interest in supporting the vision and mission of this centre of service to the universal Church. He constantly reminded the team of PCID that dialogue should have solid Christological foundations, and at the same time it should promote genuine fellowship among human seekers

On Pentecost Day 1965 Pope Paul VI said to the faithful in Rome: "We offer you an announcement... hoping it may enjoy the call and value of Pentecost. It is this – as announced some time ago, we are establishing precisely in these days here in Rome the "Secretariat for Non-Christians", an organ which will have quite different functions but a structure analogous to that for separated Christians... No pilgrim, no matter how distant he may be religiously or geographically, no matter his country of origin, will any longer be a complete stranger in this Rome, ever faithful to the historic programme the Catholic faith has reserved to it as '*patria communis*'"¹

The Institution of the "Secretariat for Non-Christians" and the promulgation of the Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, could be considered an accomplishment in the history of the Church. In the years that followed these events the entire Catholic Church, on local and universal level, worked tirelessly and with great enthusiasm to promote dialogue among

1 — Pope Paul VI, *Insegnamenti* (1964), II, p. 342

religions. However, the actual and concrete commitment to interreligious dialogue made Christians increasingly aware of the language they used to describe the partners in dialogue. To identify someone negatively should be seen as a lack of mutual respect which is the backbone of interreligious dialogue. It needs to be admitted that the word, 'non-Christian', which is sometimes used by Christians to describe Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims or the followers of any other religion, fails to identify them correctly and with respect due to them.

A Significant Change in the Language for Interreligious Dialogue

It was Pope John Paul II who, through his Apostolic Constitution, *Pastor Bonus*, which he promulgated on Roman Curia on 28 June 1988, made the much desired change in the name of the Secretariat. He called it "Pontificium Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones" (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue or PCID), assigning to it the competence to favour and regulate relations with members and groups of other religions which are not included under any Christian denomination, and also with people who are, in whatever manner, endowed with a religious sense".

The official historical note in the *Annuario Pontificio*² reads: "The competence of the dicastery of the Roman Curia is to promote adequate studies (on various religious traditions) and to favour friendly relations of the Church with the followers of other religions. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious dialogue is linked, for doctrinal and practical aspects, to the Conciliar Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*".

Pope John Paul II directed, sustained, encouraged and enlightened the work of PCID for more than half of its forty years' existence. His personal guidance, innovative initiatives, articulated words, prophetic gestures and inspiring vision has shaped the PCID and its work. Inviting people of all religions to collaborate he promoted harmony in society and peace in the world. In this he became the universal pastor, also of all men and women of good will.

PCID is at the Direct Service of the Universal Pastor

As Pope's own Council the PCID is at the service of the Holy Father in order to help him in his universal ministry³. The primary aim of the

2 Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Annuario Pontificio*, Vatican City: 2004, p. 1853

PCID is therefore to give counsel to the Pope, when he asks for it, and to follow his directions and instructions regarding the promotion of interreligious dialogue. It must be said that the PCID alone is not, for the most part, directly engaged in dialogue with people of other religions. It cannot pretend to do so. The PCID depends principally on the active and close collaboration of the local Churches throughout the world for the promotion of interreligious dialogue, because the local Churches, being realities on the grass-root levels, really encounter followers of other religions by living amidst them. The PCID, therefore, in the name of the Holy Father, motivates, encourages and even urges the local Churches to promote friendly and respectful relations among people of all religions.

Like other dicasteries of the Roman Curia the Pontifical Council for Interreligious dialogue has an episcopal committee of bishops from all parts of the world, consultors in Rome, and consultors throughout the world, including lay persons, who work in close collaboration with the permanent staff of the Council. All these are directly nominated by the Pope for the term of five years. The consultors meet, continent-wise, at least once during the five-year term. The Episcopal committee of bishops meets approximately once in three years in "Plenary Assembly" in order to give general orientation to the work of the Council. This body of members is accountable directly to the Pope who receives them in private audience when they meet for the Plenary Assembly.

Interreligious Dialogue has a Clear and Articulated Orientation in the Church

Interreligious dialogue is not a vague adventure undertaken by the Catholic Church. It stands on a solid theological foundation. Although

3 For example, when John Paul II visited the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria, on 6 May 2001 he said to the Muslim leaders: "At the highest level, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue represents the Catholic Church in this task (promoting dialogue among religions). For more than thirty years the Council has sent a message to Muslims on the occasion of *Id al Fitr* at the close of Ramadan, and I am very happy that this gesture has been welcomed by many Muslims as a sign of growing friendship between us. In recent years the Council has established a liaison committee with international Islamic Organisations, and also with *al Azhar* in Egypt, which I had the pleasure of visiting last year".

short in its length, pastoral in its outlook and modest in covering the vast study of religious traditions of humankind, *Nostra Aetate* gives clear orientation concerning interreligious dialogue. It is a 'Magna Carta' of the Catholic Church regarding the relations of the Catholic faithful with other religious traditions and their respective followers. *Nostra Aetate* gives orientation to Catholics to further develop theology concerning the Church's dialogue with other religious traditions. While *Nostra Aetate* invites Christians to open up in dialogue towards people of other religions and their respective religious traditions, it also exhorts Christians to remain uncompromisingly committed to the truth of their own faith. Pope John Paul II manifests his conviction to engage in interreligious dialogue by referring to the *Acts of the Apostles*, as cited by *Nostra Aetate*⁴. Pope John Paul II builds his reflections concerning interreligious relations following the path shown by the Conciliar tradition, thus forging new paths which are necessary, given the present situation of our world. In other words, John Paul II makes the teaching of the Council concretely applicable to the pluralistic society today. James Fredericks observes that "Since the first year of his papacy, John Paul II has responded to the reality of religious diversity by turning to a theology of the Holy Spirit"⁵.

4 *Nostra Aetate*, 1

5 James Fredericks, "The Catholic Church and Other Religious Paths : Rejecting Nothing that is True and Holy" in *Theological Studies*, 64 (2003), p. 233; This theme of the Holy Spirit recurs often in the thought of Pope John Paul II. For example, to the participants in General Audience on 9 September 1999 Pope John Paul II said: "It must first be kept in mind that every quest of the human spirit for truth and goodness, and in the last analysis for God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The various religions arose precisely from this primordial human openness to God. At their origins we often find founders who, with the help of God's Spirit, achieved a deeper religious experience. Handed on to others this experience took form in the doctrines, rites and precepts of the various religions". Again, in the Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II affirms that the Spirit's presence and activity are universal and in the hearts of every human person. The Spirit is the source of every human being's religious quest, which arises from the structure of his being. The Spirit's activity affects not only individuals but also religious institutions. He writes: "The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man" (n.29).

Interreligious Dialogue is, above all, Learning to Relate to Different People

Pope John Paul II greatly contributed to forming Christians' conscience and guiding their path in order that they should relate, by being rooted in the integrity of their own faith, to the followers of other religions in friendly and in respectful manner. More than being a cerebral and intellectual exercise he understood interreligious dialogue as an encounter between believers of different religions. The thrust is on promoting fellowship, creating a climate of cordiality and trust between Christians and the followers of other religions so that Christians are able to dissipate prejudice and ignorance, to establish fruitful contact with members of other religions in order to collaborate on questions of common concern. Pope John Paul II vitalised the apostolate of interreligious dialogue in order to promote peace in the world and harmony in society⁶. This is what he said to the Representatives of the various Religions during his visit to India in 1986: "The fruit of dialogue is union between people and union of people with God, who is the source and revealer of all truth and whose Spirit guides men in freedom only when they meet one another in all honesty and love. By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God. We should use the legitimate means of human friendliness, mutual understanding and interior persuasion"⁷.

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- 6 Cf. Felix Machado, "Pope John Paul II and His Mission of Peace" in *Vidyajyoti*, 67, (2003), pp. 838-853. Pope John Paul II, rooted in the vision of the Second Vatican Council, sees the mission of the Church as becoming a "Sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all the human race" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). The Pope later affirmed that "unity of the divine origin of the whole human family, of every man and woman, which is reflected in the unity of the divine image which each one bears in himself (cf. Gen 1:26) and *per se* gives the orientation to a common goal (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1) The Church is called to work with all her energies (evangelisation, prayer, dialogue) so that the wounds and divisions of men – which separate them from their origin and goal, and make them hostile to one another – may be healed. It means also that the entire human race, in the infinite complexity of history, with all its different cultures, is 'called to form the new people of God' (*Lumen Gentium* 1) in which the blessed union of God with man and the unity of the human family are healed, consolidated, and raised up..." (Pope John Paul II, "Address to the Roman Curia on 22 December 1986") n.3.
- 7 *Insegnamenti* (1986), IX/1, pp. 319-324, 2

In keeping with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council Pope John Paul II views other religions positively. He wishes that Christians' encounter with other religions be an occasion also to strengthen their own Christian faith. In his first Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "It sometimes happens that the firm belief of the followers of non-Christian religions – a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the mystical Body – can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church, and prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissiveness"⁸.

Christians are Motivated to Dialogue Primarily Because of their Faith

In the first Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, held in 1979, the members discussed a possible document in the form of a "Directory for Interreligious Dialogue". The Plenary Assembly concluded with a suggestion from the members to prepare a document (not a Directory) to clarify the relationship between Dialogue and Mission. In the Second Plenary Assembly which took place between 27 February and 4 March 1984, a document, "*The Attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Followers of Other Religions, Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*" (DM), was finalised. Pope John Paul II, upon receiving the members in private Audience on 3 March 1984, said: "I am happy to meet with you at the conclusion of the work of the Plenary Assembly, during which you have involved yourselves in studying and coming to a more profound understanding of the general topic, 'Dialogue and Mission'... In fact, no one can fail to see the importance and the need which interreligious dialogue assumes for all religions and all believers, called today more than ever to collaborate so that every person can reach his transcendent goal and realise his authentic growth and to help cultures preserve their own religious and spiritual values in the presence of rapid social changes... Dialogue is fundamental for the Church, which is called to collaborate in God's plan with its methods of presence, respect, and love towards all persons (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 10-12; *Ecclesiam Suam*, 41-42; *Redemptor Hominis*, 11-12)... No local Church is exempt from this duty, which is made urgent by

continuous changes. Because of migrations, travels, social communications and personal choices, believers of different religions and cults easily meet each other and often live together. Therefore an apostolate which promotes respect, acceptance, and witness is necessary so that spiritual values inspire our societies, which are tempted to selfishness, atheism and materialism... All Christians are called to dialogue. Some have an expertise which is very useful, while others make a notable contribution through their special gifts. Adequate preparation and a constant deepening of one's own ecclesial identity is necessary for all. Dialogue with non-Christians can also be a way of realising unity among Christian Churches which are moved by the same love of Christ"⁹.

Christians have been primarily motivated to encounter followers of other religions for spiritual and theological reasons. Pope John Paul II made the faith of the Church his foundation, a launching pad, for dialogue with people of other religions. The above-mentioned document, *Dialogue and Mission*, explains this in the following words: "The Church...feels itself called to dialogue principally because of its faith. In the Trinitarian mystery, Christian revelation allows us to glimpse in God a life of communion and interchange. In God, the Father, we contemplate a pervasive love unlimited by space and time. Every reality and every event are surrounded by his love... the Church has the duty of discovering and bringing to light and fullness all the riches which the Father has hidden in creation and history, not only to celebrate the glory of God in its liturgy but also to promote among mankind the movement of the gifts of the Father... In God the Son we are given the word and wisdom in whom everything was already contained and subsisting even from the beginning of time. Christ is the Word who enlightens every person because in Him is manifested at the same time the mystery of God and the mystery of mankind (cf. RH 8, 10, 11,13). He is the redeemer present with grace in every human encounter, to liberate us from our selfishness and to make us love one another as he has loved us... In God the Holy Spirit, our faith allows us to perceive the force of life and

9 Pope John Paul II, "Address at the Conclusion of the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat, 3 March 1984", Published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), *The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions, Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, Vatican: 1984

movement and continuous regeneration (cf. LG 4) who acts in the depth of people's consciences and accompanies them on the secret path of hearts towards truth (cf. GS 22). The Spirit also works 'outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body' (RH 6, cf. LG 16, GS 22, AG 15). The Spirit both anticipates and accompanies the path of the Church which, nevertheless, feels itself impelled to discern the signs of Her presence, to follow Her wherever She leads and to serve Her as a humble and discreet collaborator... The reign of God is the final end of all persons. The Church, which is to be 'its seed and beginning' (LG 5,9), is called from the first to start out on this path towards the kingdom and, along with the rest of humanity, to advance towards that goal"¹⁰.

Interreligious Dialogue must always Translate into Actions

Pope John Paul II used to invite occasionally to his table those whom he had appointed with the responsibility of directing the work of different offices of the Roman Curia. As Undersecretary of the PCID I had several occasions to informally converse with the Pope over a simple lunch. The Pope wanted to know religions as their respective followers understood them and how they could be related to the mystery of the Church. He had great admiration for people like Mahatma Gandhi. He was the one who passionately defended the dignity of every human person who is, by nature, '*homo religiosus*'. He looked for concrete actions in favour of promoting human dignity. Pope John Paul II encouraged friendly and respectful relations among the followers of different religions and thus upheld dignity of every human person.

John Paul II convened two meetings in Assisi, inviting religious leaders to pray for peace: 27 October 1986 and 24 January 2002. He made it clear at the very outset of these meetings that peace is not a fruit of negotiations which partners in dialogue speculate by sitting across the conference table. Peace is God's gift and so is genuine dialogue. Mere human ideas, detached from belief in God, must not dominate the exercise of dialogue. And dialogue is not, first and foremost, a cerebral discussion with futile polemics and endless arguments. It is a spiritual endeavour. God must remain at the centre of any honest dialogue. He said in Assisi: "The coming together of so many religious leaders to pray is in itself an invitation to the world to become aware that there

10 PCID, *The Attitude of the Church*... nn. 22, 23 and 24.

exists another dimension of peace and another way of promoting it, which is not a result of negotiations, political compromises or economic bargaining. It is the result of prayer, which, in the diversity of religions, expresses a relationship with a supreme power that surpasses our human capacities alone"¹¹. Again in Assisi in 2002 he said: "*To pray is not to escape from history* and the problems which it presents. On the contrary, it is to choose to face reality not on our own, but with the strength that comes from on high, the strength of truth and love which have their ultimate source in God. Faced with the treachery of evil, religious people can count on God, who absolutely wills what is good. They can pray to him to have the courage to face even the greatest difficulties with a sense of personal responsibility, never yielding to fatalism or impulsive reactions"¹².

Pope John Paul II had dedicated the year 1999 to God the Father (as a preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000); this led him to encourage reflection on humanity as constituting a single family and to call for meetings of people of different religions. This is why the Presiding Council of the Central Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 thought it opportune to hold an Interreligious Assembly. This was held from 25-28 October 1999 in the Vatican. The Pope himself concluded this Assembly. To the religious leaders, representing some twenty religions, and to a large gathering in St Peter's Square in Rome the Pope said: "I have always believed that religious leaders have a vital role to play in nurturing that hope of justice and peace without which there will be no future worthy of humanity... The task before us therefore is to promote a culture of dialogue. Individually and together, we must show how religious belief inspires peace, encourages solidarity, promotes justice and upholds liberty"¹³. Pope John Paul II had assigned the work of organising the interreligious aspect of the above three meetings to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

- 11 John Paul II, "Opening address at the World Day of Prayer for Peace" in the Basilica of St Mary of Angels", 27 October 1986.
- 12 John Paul II, "Address to the Participants in the World Day of Peace, 24 January 2002" in *Peace: A Single Goal and a Shared Intention*, PCID, 2002, n. 6.
- 13 Pope John Paul II, "Address to the Participants in Interreligious Assembly", in *Towards a Culture of Dialogue*, PCID, 1999, nn. 2 and 3.

Believers must Collaborate to Promote Peace and Harmony in Society

Pope John Paul II often linked the theme of interreligious dialogue to that of the social teaching of the Church. He was deeply convinced that the followers of different religions should come together and collaborate in order to transform the situation of crisis into that of peace and harmony. His Encyclical Letters on social doctrine and his numerous messages on the occasion of the World Day of Peace (celebrated annually on 1st January) brought in the dimension of interreligious dialogue to establish and strengthen peace in the world.

Interreligious Dialogue is a Part of the Evangelising Mission of the Church

To those who saw the missionary activity of the Church opposed to dialogue among religions Pope John Paul II responded in his Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*: "Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelising mission... Dialogue is not opposed to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions. This mission, in fact, is addressed to those who do not know Christ and his Gospel, and who belong for the most part to other religions. In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love. He does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain 'gaps, insufficiencies and errors'... the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable... Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation"¹⁴.

Faith in Jesus Christ, the Unique and Universal Mediator

The Church has always held uncompromisingly that Jesus Christ is

14 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 55

unique and universal Saviour. This fundamental faith of the Church need not become an obstacle to Christians' dialogue with the followers of other religions. "This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in radical way, that mentality of indifferentism characterised by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that 'one religion is as good as another'"¹⁵. Pope John Paul II was himself an excellent example for interreligious dialogue because, by being deeply rooted in his faith he, at the same time, had been an accepted friend and an uncontested moral leader of people across religious boundaries. Addressing the Plenary Assembly of the PCID in 2004 Pope John Paul II said to the participants: "Over the next years the Church will assiduously endeavour to answer the great challenge of interreligious dialogue. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I emphasised that the millennium just begun is situated in the climate of 'increased cultural and religious pluralism' (n. 55). Dialogue is therefore important and must continue, since it 'is part of the Church's evangelising mission', in 'intimate connection' with the proclamation of Christ and at the same time distinct from it, without confusion and manipulation (cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, n.55). However, so as to foster such dialogue with the followers of other religions, all religious relativism and indifferentism must be avoided, making the effort to offer respectfully to all the joyful witness of the 'hope that is in us' (cf. 1 Pt 3:15)"¹⁶.

Commenting on the unique mediatory role of Christ in the salvation of all people Pope John Paul II writes: "Jesus does not in fact merely speak 'in the name of God' like the Prophets, but he is God himself speaking in his Eternal Word made flesh. Here we touch upon the *essential point by which Christianity differs from all the other religions*, by which *man's search for God* has been expressed from earliest times. Christianity has its starting-point in the Incarnation of the Word. Here, it is not simply a case of man seeking God, but of God who comes in Person to speak to man himself and to show him the path by which he may be reached. This is what is proclaimed in the Prologue of John's Gospel: 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the

15 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Letter *Pastores Gregis*, n. 68.

16 Pope John Paul II, "Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of PCID – 15 May 2004", n. 3, in *Pro Dialogo*, 116-117, 2004/2 and 3,

Father, he has made him known' (1:18). *The Incarnate Word is thus the fulfilment of the yearning present in all the religions of mankind*: This fulfilment is brought about by God himself and transcends all human expectations. It is the mystery of Grace... In Christ, religion is no longer a 'blind search for God' (cf. Acts 17:27) but the *response of faith* to God who reveals himself. It is a response in which man speaks to God as his Creator and Father, a response made possible by that one Man who is also the consubstantial Word in whom God speaks to each individual person and by whom each individual person is enabled to respond to God. What is more, in this Man all creation responds to God. Jesus Christ is the new beginning of everything. In him all things come into their own: they are taken up and given back to the Creator from whom they first came. Christ is thus the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion"¹⁷.

Honesty, Sincerity and Truthfulness are necessary in Interreligious Dialogue

Pope John Paul II also taught Christians to firmly witness to truth in their dialogue with the followers of other religions. He advocated a dialogue which should be carried out in honesty and sincerity. In other words, partners in dialogue who represent different religions must not hide truth as if to pretend not to hurt the other. Obviously, being sensitive to the feelings of the partners Christians must find a way to address the truth in question. Whether it is to defend the principle of religious freedom, to promote a project in favour of the poor or to denounce unjust aggression of war, Pope John Paul II, respectfully but firmly, spoke his mind out. At the beginning of the new millennium he wrote: "The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: *a name of peace and a summons to peace*"¹⁸.

In his Message on the occasion of the World Day of Peace in 1999 Pope John Paul II wrote in all frankness and honesty: "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises that the right to religious freedom includes the right to manifest personal beliefs, whether individually or

17 . Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, n. 6

18 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 55.

with others, in public or in private (Art. 18). In spite of this, there still exist today places where the right to gather for worship is either not recognised or is limited to the members of one religion alone. This grave violation of one of the fundamental rights of the person is a source of enormous suffering for believers. When a State grants special status to one religion, this must not be to the detriment of others. Yet it is a common knowledge that there are nations in which individuals, families and entire groups are still being discriminated against and marginalized because of their religious beliefs"¹⁹.

It is well known that today religion is instrumentalised and politicised. It is (ab)used and exploited by some for vested interests. To them John Paul II said unequivocally: "...Religious leaders must clearly show that they are pledged to the promotion of peace precisely because of their religious belief. Religion is not, and must not become, a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious, cultural and ethnic identity coincide..." No one can consider himself faithful to the great and merciful God who in the name of the same God dares kill his brother' (General Audience, 26 October 1994). Religion and peace go together: to wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction"²⁰.

Again, in yet another message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace he wrote: "Those who kill by acts of terrorism are actually despair of humanity, of life, of the future. In their view everything is to be hated and destroyed... Terrorism is often the outcome of that fanatic *fundamentalism* which springs from the conviction that one's own vision

19 Pope John Paul II, "Message for the World Day of Peace on 1st January 1999", in *Pro Dialgo*, 102, 1999/3, p.281; cf. also his "Message on the occasion of World Day of Peace in 1988". He wrote: "Religious freedom, an essential requirement of the dignity of every person, is a cornerstone of the structure of the Human Rights, and for this reason an irreplaceable factor in the good of individuals and of the whole society". To the Ambassador of the Republic of Egypt he said on 4 October 1996; "It is not sufficient that the commitment to ensuring such (religious) freedom be expressed: it must influence in a real and practical way the actions of political and religious leaders and the behaviour of believers themselves".

20 Pope John Paul II, "Opening Address To the Participants in the VI Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace" (WCRP); Vatican: 3 November 1994, in *Pro Dialogo*, 88, 1995/1, p. 6

of the truth must be forced upon everyone else. Instead, even when the truth has been reached – and this can happen only in a limited and imperfect way – it can never be imposed. Respect for a person's conscience, where the image of God himself is reflected (cf. *Gen* 1: 26-27), means that we can only propose the truth to others, who are then responsible for accepting it. To try to impose on others by violent means what we consider to be the truth is an offence against human dignity, and ultimately an offence against God whose image that person bears. For this reason, what is usually referred to as fundamentalism is an attitude radically opposed to belief in God. *Terrorism exploits not just people, it exploits God*: it ends by making him an idol to be used for one's own purposes...Consequently, no religious leader can condone terrorism, and much less preach it. It is a profanation of religion to declare oneself a terrorist in the name of God, to do violence to others in his name. Terrorist violence is contradiction of faith in God, the Creator of man, who cares for man and loves him"²¹.

Vatican

21 Pope John Paul II, "Message on the Occasion of the World Day of Peace", 1 January 2002, in *Pro Dialogo* 109, 2002/1, nn.6 and 7

John Paul II: Christology, Dialogue, Mission

G. Gispert-Sauch

George Gispert-Sauch, Professor at Vidyajyoti, Delhi, explores the deeper christological foundations of the culture of interreligious dialogue promoted by John Paul II. The Pope looks at the entire humanity as one single family. The divine Spirit is active in the heart of every human person. *Semina Verbi* are present in cultures and religions. This has to be respected and discovered. For us Christians faith in Christ is the light in which we recognize the divine presence in history. In this process the recognition of the working of the Spirit and the proclamation of Christ are complementary.

In the fall of 1986, a few months after his ten-day visit to India, John Paul II astonished the world, not least his own advisors and helpers in the Vatican, by inviting representatives of many Christian Churches and denominations and of many other religions to come to Assisi to pray for peace in the world. That 27 of October was a mega-event for the world media, although perhaps in India its impact was weaker than in the West. But not a few Catholics were aghast with the very idea. How can Catholics, and the Pope first of all, pray together with people who had such disparate ideas about 'God' – some of them like the Buddhist even being 'officially' atheists – and who gave so many different meanings to the word 'prayer'? The decision was all the more surprising as it came from a Pope from Poland whose main concern, until his election as Pope, had been the struggle against the communist regime and who had had relatively little contact with the world of religions.

The Roman Curia hastened to offer its 'clarification' that to many sounded like sophistry: "The leaders would not come to pray together – they would come together to pray." I am not sure that such was the deeper theological understanding of the Pope. He said at the end of the day, perhaps in an oblique reference to the theological scruples expressed about the event, that "every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy

Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart,” a saying that he repeated less than two months later when explaining the October event in his Christmas address to the Cardinals and other members of the Roman Curia (AAS 79 [1987] 1082-1090, n. 11). We cannot forget that five months earlier John Paul II had issued his encyclical letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, on the Holy Spirit, the third of a trilogy of letters developing the role of each Person of the Holy Trinity. In it he had commented on the role of the Holy Spirit from the beginning of history, “for his action has been exercised in every place and at every time, indeed in every individual according to the eternal plan of salvation” (n.53). And so was also in Assisi 1986.

The Pope went further. He saw in the meeting of so many religious symbols and believers from so many cultures and traditions *a vision of a future world*. “Let us see in it [the Assisi meeting] an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be, a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which he sets before us.” In the address to the Roman Curia mentioned above he made three points: that the whole of humankind is one family, because of its common origin and its destiny to enjoy the fullness of life in God; that God’s one plan of salvation has its centre in Jesus Christ who in his incarnation has, as Vatican II asserted and the Pope repeated in his first encyclical, “united himself in some manner to every human person” (RH 13); and finally that there is an active presence of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of members of other religions, mysteriously working for the implementation of God’s universal plan. This “mystery of unity” was clearly manifested in Assisi, “in spite of the differences between the religious professions” (AAS loc. cit., n. 8).

The event also clarified the mission of the Church: “The Church – that is, we ourselves – has understood better, in the light of this event, what is the true sense of the mystery of unity and reconciliation which the Lord has entrusted to us, and which he himself carried out first when he offered his life “not only for the nation only but to gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad (Jn 11:52).”

Significant Letters

The Assisi spiritual gathering, offering the pattern of a future world, finds its deeper theological explanation in three important letters of the Pope: his first encyclical, opening the trilogy, *Redemptor Hominis* (RH), published in 1979, seven years before Assisi and less than one year

after his surprising election to the Papacy. This letter offers us a glimpse of the Pope's vision of Jesus Christ in God's universal plan, the foundation of both his 'missiology' and his 'dialogology'. The second great letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), was published on 7th December 1990, to officially commemorate the 25th anniversary of the closure of the second Vatican Council and specially of the approval of the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad gentes*. The third letter is a complement to the other two and applies the Pope's vision to our continent. It is the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (EiA), signed in New Delhi on Diwali day of 1999.

In RM 11 the Pope recalls the vision suggested by Vatican II and Paul VI. The terrestrial globe is a "map of various religions" which the Pope sees as overlaid by the map of "modern atheism" – which we may well assume symbolizes and includes all forms of injustice, oppression, domination of one culture over others. One cannot fail to see in this presentation a reflection of the situation in Poland which the Pope had experienced since the end of World War II in 1945. For the Pope the religions of the world and the Church belong to the same side in a cosmic war: together they fight the forces of atheism which he sees as essentially oppressive of the human. Like St Ignatius Loyola in his meditation of 'The Two Standards', John Paul II does not see religions among the enemies of the standard of Christ, or among the objects of conquest of the eternal king appointed by God (SE 92, 95). The enemy is the "Standard of Satan" that enslaves people with false values of "riches, honours and pride" which Jesus Christ came to overthrow with his message of "poverty, insults and humility" (SE 145). We are convinced that most religions in their own way fight a similar battle. The Pope does not think that Christian mission is against them. It is with them, fighting the same battle for the establishment of the values sanctioned by the Gospel. The Pope further points out that the full meaning of these values shines in the person of Jesus Christ and in his discipleship. Here as in many other passages the Pope appeals to the Patristic theological theme of "the seeds of the Word" (see RH 11, RM 28 and *passim*).

Semina Verbi

The "seeds" are not really scattered at random by a generous Divine Sower offering to mother earth innumerable different sprouts of divine life. Rather they are all seeds of the same Word who is no other than the Son of God, Jesus Christ, revealed to us in his incarnation. Perhaps it is

worth noting here that in the official texts of the Vatican Council there are two different uses of this expression “seeds of the word/Word” distinguished only by capitalization of the Latin ‘Word’. (1) In ‘*semen verbi*’ *verbum* means the word of the actual preaching of the Gospel message (e.g. in LG 36), and is equivalent to *Evangelii semina* (AA 11) or “seeds of the Gospel.” Similarly we read of “the seed (*semen*) which is the word of God, germinating from good soil, watered by the divine dew absorbs moisture and transforms and assimilates it into itself, so that finally it bears much fruit” (AG 22; cf. also PO 22). It is not necessarily only the preached word that carries this meaning: there is also in human beings a noble calling and “a kind of divine seed” (*divinum quoddam semen*) (GS 3). Similarly, seeds (*semina*) of ascetic and contemplative traditions were often inserted by God in ancient cultures (AG 18). (2) At least in two cases the Council capitalizes *Verbum* in the expression *semina Verbi*: In AG 11 it exhorts Christians with joy and reverence to discover the seeds of the Word (*semina Verbi*) hidden in the national and religious traditions of various peoples. Similarly “The Holy Spirit, calls all to Christ by means of seeds of the Word (*semina Verbi*) and the preaching of the Gospel” (AG 15)¹ [1] In (1) we have an epexegetic genitive: the seed which is the word preached by the Church, or the word in the form of the human vocation and cultural undertakings. In (2) we have rather a subjective genitive, “the seeds [implanted] by the [divine] Word.”

Both expressions, *semina verbi* and *semina Verbi*, seem to be the Latin version of a Greek Patristic expression borrowed from the Stoics and popularized among others by St Justin: we find in all creation the presence of the *logos spermatikos*, the “germinating Word” or the “seminal Word” or the “sprouting Word”, but with different degrees of participation: as law of nature, as innate reason, or as immanent revelation. But for Justin its full measure is found in the revelation of the Divine Word in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God and Human History

Jesus Christ is more than “a seed of the Word” that would have been sown in Mary’s womb about two thousand years ago. He is the personal presence of the Word in history revealing its ultimate significance. From the beginning of his papacy John Paul II saw human history from the perspective of the end of the millennium to which he already alluded in his first encyclical and which he prepared for and celebrated with such intense spiritual and apostolic activity. His whole Pontificate was in a

sense a preparation and celebration of the closure of the second and the inauguration of the third millennium. For him this significant transition was a reminder of the historical vocation of humanity going to a specific goal. His was a vision of the flow of history with an eschatological perspective, directed to the final coming of the Lord Jesus, the same one who lived in Palestine, died and rose for us, and who really fills all history. God spoke through his Son from the beginning of history. In his first encyclical he recalls the solemn opening of the letter to the Hebrews:

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a son..." (1:1-2), by the Son, his Word, who became man and was born of the Virgin Mary. This act of redemption marked the high point of human history within God's loving plan. God entered the history of humanity and, as a human being, became an actor in that history, one of the thousands of millions of human beings but at the same time Unique!" (RH 1).

History is not a uniform flow of monotonous time (*chronos*): it is shaped by the ups and downs of human events; it has high and low points, and it has also a direction, a goal, an *eschaton* that is revealed not only at the end (though its full meaning will be known then) but influences the whole flow, and was manifested in its midst so that the *eschaton* was in the heart of time, as Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ Revelation of the Human

Jesus Christ is not only the Word of God made flesh. Nor is he merely the ultimate revelation of God. For God's revelation has to do with humanity. For John Paul II Jesus Christ is the revelation of the depth of human history and therefore the revelation of the full meaning of being human, as stated in GS 22, to which the Pope often referred. "For by his incarnation the Son of God *united himself in some sense to every human being*. He laboured with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted with a human will, and loved with a human heart." Christ is not only "like" us in all things but sin, but is present in every human being in her or his positive acceptance of the Divine and his or her inclusion in the Paschal Mystery.

John Paul II's theology is a theology of humanism in the best sense of the word. As a playwright, an artist, a poet, a philosopher, theologian and mystic, the human family is for him the centre from which the meaning of the universe flows out. But like in *Gaudium et Spes* his humanism is not anthropocentrism: human salvation is not a Pelagian

enterprise. Reflecting the Byzantine Easter liturgy, this foundational section of GS ends with a doxology: "Christ is risen, by his death destroying death, and has bestowed life on us so that as children in the Son, we cry in the Spirit 'Abba, Father'!" (GS 22).

From his youth the Pope was certain that faith and not atheistic communism can offer a 'philosophy' that defends the human in its totality. With *Gaudium et Spes*, in the composition of which he was deeply involved, Archbishop Wojtyla saw Jesus Christ both as the revelation of the Divine as the revelation of what being human means.

This revelation of the human marks the path for all the Church's activity. "The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life, with the power of the truth about the human reality that is contained in the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption and with the power of love that is radiated by that truth" (RH 13). Today as much as or more than any other time and in spite of all appearances to the contrary, "Jesus Christ becomes present with the power of truth and love that is expressed in him with unrepeatable fullness" (ibid.). This relation of Jesus Christ to all human beings is, so to say, ontological, inscribed in the mystery of creation so that "each one of the four thousand million human beings living in our planet has from the moment of his or her conception beneath the mother's heart become a sharer of the mystery of Christ" (ibid.).

For the Pope Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church. But because in his theology Christ is the revelation of the human, "the human being *is the primary and fundamental way for the Church*" (italics in the original, RH 14). Indeed this is the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption" (ibid.). He explains the inclusion of these mysteries in every human being by quoting GS 10:

In the human heart various elements are in opposition. On the one hand human beings as creatures experience considerable limitations, while on the other hand they are aware of being unlimited in their desires and of being summoned to a higher life. They are subject to many attractions and constantly compelled to choose between them and renounce some of them. And being weak and sinful, they frequently do what they would not, and fail to do what they would (Rom 7:14ff). They experience internal disunity within themselves, from which many disharmonies in society also arise.

In RM written midway through his pontificate the Pope also stresses the anthropo-focal nature of God's revelation in Jesus Christ as the main motive that makes him stress the urgency of the missionary evangelization:

"What moves me even more strongly to proclaim the urgency of missionary evangelization is the fact that it is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvellous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself. 'Christ the Redeemer', I wrote in my first Encyclical, "fully reveals man to himself... The person who wishes to understand himself or herself thoroughly... must...draw near to Christ. The Redemption that took place through the Cross has definitely restored dignity to humanity and given back meaning to life in the world" (RM 2, quoting RH 10).

The Pope has no doubts as to Jesus Christ is the one Saviour of all since he alone, the Son, can reveal the Father in the fullest and definitive way. Surely participated forms of mediation of different kinds are not excluded, but "they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's mediation and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to him" (RM 5. stress in original). "Parallelism" rather than pluralism, is excluded. This means that there is a point of convergence operating within and underlying human history which shares simultaneously the historical condition and the eschatological destiny. That point of convergence is not just God, or the Word of God, but the Christ incarnate, self-sacrificed in love, and raised from the dead, Jesus, the Son of God, and yet fully human like us.

Two Proclamations

The Pope speaks of two proclamations: the proclamation of God's Kingdom of love, as done by Jesus, and the proclamation of Jesus Christ as done by the early Church that identified the Kingdom with him. "The two proclamations are complementary: each throws light on the other" (RM 16). Though they are distinct, it is necessary to unite both.

By its very nature the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the competence of his followers in the Church, but the proclamation of the Kingdom is not their exclusive right and concern. On the contrary, "the Kingdom is the concern of every one: individuals, society, the world" (RM 15). All are in mission, the *missio Dei*. Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity which is present in human

history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for the liberation from evil in all its forms" (ibid.). To this all are invited.

It would seem to me therefore that this vision of the Pope entitles us to see, with due discernment, all honest work done in the world by bodies like the UNO, the national Parliaments, the grass-root local decision making bodies, as fulfilling the *missio Dei*. This simply expresses the fact that we are all responsible for the well being of our world. That God's Kingdom is fulfilled and proclaimed in the Risen Christ the Pope has no hesitation to affirm at once (RM 16), but this does not undervalue the work of the fundamental mission rooted in creation. The two proclamations need each other.

If dialogue is understood in the full sense, which includes the dialogue of action, then dialogue can certainly be placed within the perspective of proclamation of the Kingdom. For the historical mission must continue. But dialogue is more than just fulfilling the mission of building the human community – it is itself a proclamation; and vice versa, the proclamation of Jesus Christ is not only for the growth of the Church – it also furthers the human community. For authentic dialogue cannot take place without sharing the deepest core of our faith, and for a Christian it will involve the testimony of the meaning of Jesus Christ for oneself. On the other hand, by proclaiming Jesus Christ in whom the fullness of humanness is revealed "one furthers human freedom" (RM 39) and the values on which it is based. Indeed, it is the same "Spirit who is always at work both when He gives life to the Church and impels her to proclaim Christ, and when he implants and develops his gifts in all individuals and peoples" (RM 29). The two actions of the same Spirit are not uncoordinated: they meet precisely in dialogue, with the Spirit "guiding the Church to *discover* these gifts (of the Spirit), to *foster* them and to *receive* them through dialogue" (ibid., italics added). One could hardly think of a better definition of dialogue!

The Holy Spirit

Some of the most inspiring texts in the Pope's encyclicals are those in which following Vatican II he describes the marvellous presence and action of the Holy Spirit throughout human history. John Paul II speaks of how the Holy Spirit is at work in the heart of every person and is found in human activities – including religious ones – and in all human efforts to attain truth, goodness, and God himself. The Spirit thus offers to the human race "the light and strength to respond to the *highest* calling" (RM 28, stress added). The Pope does not hesitate to call this

Spirit-enabled response an enterprise of *faith*, quoting GS 15: “By the gift of the Holy Spirit humanity attains in faith (*fide*) to the contemplation and savouring of the mystery of God’s design.”

The presence of the Spirit is equated to the presence of the Risen Christ who “is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit, not only instilling a desire for the world to come but also thereby animating, purifying and reinforcing the nobler aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end” (quoted from GS 38). This is the ‘participation in the Paschal Mystery’ which attains its full maturity in the profession of the Christian faith.

Repentance for Dialogue

Among the most significant gestures of John Paul II, surely inspired by the Holy Spirit, were his repeated public expressions of repentance for the sins and wrongs committed by Christians in the course of the centuries. These expressions had their climax in the Lenten Prayer Service for Forgiveness of the Jubilee Year 2000. Besides a general confession of sins in general the service specifically named six areas for which pardon was being asked: 1) intolerance and wrong methods in the service of truth; 2) sins against the unity of the Church; 3) sins against the people of Israel (anti-semitism); 4) sins of pride and hatred against weaker groups and respect due to cultures and religions; 5) sins of anti-feminism and against the unity of the human race; and 6) sins against human rights specially in the use of biotechnology.

These courageous acts repeated in various forms throughout the pontificate are intrinsic both to dialogue and to the proclamation of Jesus Christ “through whom we have received reconciliation” (Rom 5:11). They were acts that have the power to push dialogue to deeper levels. They truly further the establishment of God’s Kingdom, a Kingdom marked by divine and human forgiveness. In a world of sin and evil, authentic forgiveness is a condition for the possibility of love to be born and flourish.

Religions, God’s Gift

John Paul II did not think that dialogue was a provisional activity of the Church to be dropped when the evangelizing task calls, although he surely stressed the obligation the Church has to preach Jesus Christ as the one in whom the Kingdom of God reaches its climax and perfection. His call in *Ecclesia in Asia* to make the third millennium the harvest time for the Church in this continent was grossly misunderstood – perhaps

also not properly formulated. He did not envisage a mono-religious world. In RM 19 he makes clear that the purpose of the proclamation of Jesus Christ falls within the overall perspective of promoting the Kingdom of God. It is "to establish and build up communities that make present and active *within humanity* a living image of the Kingdom" (stress added). "Ecclesio-monism" is rejected. The aim of evangelization is to foster a real transformation of the world, to which the living memory of Jesus, carried by the Christian community in diverse cultures and countries, makes an important contribution, added to that of other agencies. The Church is the servant of the Kingdom primarily by *receiving* the Kingdom herself (RM 20).

Fostering a positive dialogue of religions was at the centre of John Paul II's concerns, which did not prevent him from stressing the Christian obligation not to forget to announce that the Kingdom of God, or the fullness of humanity, true freedom and the reign of love, find their culminating point in the person of Jesus Christ, the revelation of what the human is. God's creation of the world had its centre in the human reality, and Jesus Christ, Son of God and Redeemer of the world, is both the revelation of the human and the centre of the created universe.

But John Paul II knew that other religions would continue, and he saw this as a gift of God to be received with joy. If some think that the culmination of dialogue consists in the proclamation and acceptance of Jesus Christ, he seemed to think as well that the formation of communities of believers in Jesus Christ was a way to enrich the dialogue of the Kingdom of God within our history. Within this broad dialogue, the contribution of Christians is to testify to the meaning of creation and history from the perspective of their faith in Jesus Christ. Not only intra-ecclesial dialogue, but also the interreligious dialogue and the wider dialogue of the Church with the world in all its complexity remain a permanent feature of the Church of Jesus Christ and its evangelizing mission (RM 55).

The root of his vision was the Pope's faith in Jesus Christ as revealer of God and of the human, who through his incarnation somehow united to every human being, and who is the redeemer of the world. This faith fertilized his deep humanistic vision of a world created good by God, where the human family, called to love, has a central place.

Mission and Inter Religious Dialogue in the Teachings of John Paul II

Jacob Kavunkal

In this article Jacob Kavunkal SVD, professor of missiology at Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, clarifies the perspectives of John Paul II on Church's evangelizing mission. Christ is the *Saviour of the entire humanity* – this has to be proclaimed to all peoples. Church is the *ordinary means* of salvation – this has to be made clear to all. However this has to be done not with aggressive attitudes, but with *great respect* for the ways in which the divine Spirit works in human hearts and cultures. Hence inter-religious dialogue is a *constitutive part* of the mission of the Church. Through dialogue Christians are enriched by the faith-experiences of others, who in turn are brought to know what Christ means to humanity. Dialogue contributes to the promotion of peace and justice in human society.

John Paul II was deeply committed to the church's mission, especially to the non-Christian areas, which he clearly identified as lying "in Asia, but also in Africa, Latin America and Oceania – [where] remain vast regions still to be evangelized" (RM 37). However, his constant pastoral journeys to these regions made him intensely aware also of the urgent need for the Church to enter into dialogue with the religions of these regions according to the teachings of Vatican II. In this article we shall examine how John Paul II situates Inter Religious Dialogue in relation to Church's mission.

Mission *Ad Gentes*

John Paul's key ideas on mission to the non-Christian world are enshrined in his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), which he wrote on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Conciliar Decree on mission, *Ad Gentes*. The encyclical basically upholds *Ad Gentes'* teachings on mission to the non-Christians. In fact, in the introduction, he spells out what

inspired him to write *Redemptoris Missio*: "Missionary activity specifically directed "to the nations" (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council" (n 2). In this context he wishes "to invite the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*."

The key to John Paul's idea of mission is articulated already in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, "the Church's fundamental function in every age, and particularly in ours, is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of Christ" (n 10). This follows from the Church's faith that Christ is the one Saviour of all "and there is salvation in no one else" (RM 5). In Christ, the definitive Word of God's revelation, "God has made himself known in the fullest possible way" (RM 5).

While John Paul acknowledges that God loves all people and grants them the possibility of being saved, he asserts how "the Church believes that God has established Christ as the one mediator and that she herself has been established as the universal sacrament of salvation" (RM 9). Hence he insists on the necessity of keeping two truths together: "the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for salvation" (RM 9). Ultimately, "*Mission is an issue of faith*, an accurate indicator of our *faith* in Christ" (RM 9). The Church cannot refrain from proclaiming Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and bringing as many people as possible into the Church. In fact, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, John Paul prays for the hope "that in the Third Christian Millennium *a great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent" (n 1).

Though the purpose of Jesus' own mission was the "proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom," Jesus himself is the "Good News" (RM 13), and "all people are called to become members of it" (RM 14). Though John Paul does not identify the Kingdom with the Church, "the Church is indissolubly united to both [Christ and the Kingdom]. Christ endowed the Church, his Body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in her" (RM 18). Hence the Church serves the Kingdom "by establishing communities and founding new particular Churches" (RM 20).

Mission *ad gentes*, therefore, "is one of the Church's fundamental activities ... The Church, in fact, cannot withdraw from her *permanent*

mission of bringing the Gospel to the multitudes, to the millions and millions of men and women – who as yet do not know Christ the Redeemer of humanity. In a specific way this is the missionary work which

Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church” (RM 31).

The Basis of Inter-religious Dialogue

For John Paul II dialogue is based on the common paternity of God as well as on the universal presence of the Spirit.

a. The One Who Sent Jesus Christ

John Paul’s Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* invites the attention of the Church on the person of God the Father, by whom Jesus Christ was sent and to whom he has returned (Jn 16:28). Church has “to broaden the horizons of believers, so that the whole of Christian life may be seen as a great pilgrimage to the house of the Father,” a journey of faith, which “takes place in the heart of each person, extends to the believing community and then reaches to the whole humanity” (n 49).

In his homily during the Eucharist in Delhi on 7 November 1999 John Paul expressed his “hope and dream that the next century will be a time of fruitful dialogue, leading to a new relationship of understanding and solidarity among the followers of all religions.”¹ He went on to insist that since men and women by inward instinct are deeply oriented to God and seek God from the depths of their being, “together we can successfully take the path of understanding and dialogue.”²

His address during the General Audience, 21 April 1999, quoting Ephesians 4:6, “One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all,” reminded Christians that “the conviction that God is really preparing all people for salvation is the basis of Christian dialogue with the followers of other religious beliefs.”³ John Paul continued: “In years past, some considered *dialogue* with the followers of other religions to be opposed to *proclamation*, a primary duty of the Church’s mission. In fact, inter-religious dialogue is an integral part of the Church’s evangelizing mission (cf. CCC n.856). As I have often stressed, it is fundamental for the Church to be an expression of her

1 *Pro Dialogo* 103 2000/1, p.48.

2 *Ibid.*

3. *Pro Dialogo* 102 1999/3, p.295.

saving mission and a dialogue of salvation (cf. *Insegnamenti* VII/1 [1984], pp.595-599). Thus, inter-religious dialogue does not mean abandoning proclamation, but answering a divine call so that exchange and sharing may lead to a mutual witness of one's own religious viewpoint, deeper knowledge of one another's convictions and agreement on certain fundamental values."⁴ John Paul concluded his address with the prayer: "May the Great Jubilee be a valuable opportunity for the followers of all religions to grow in knowledge, esteem and love for one another through a dialogue which will be an encounter of salvation for all!"⁵ Here John Paul reaffirmed what he had already written in his post Asian Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*: "In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul" (n 6). For John Paul this is the ultimate relation between proclamation and dialogue. Through inter-religious dialogue the Church proclaims her faith and at the same time she grows in faith enriched by the experience of the followers of other faiths. Thus, inter-religious dialogue is a process of mutual enrichment leading to harmony among the children of the one God.

John Paul returned to the same theme again in his address to the General Audience 19 May 1999. "The universal fatherhood of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, spurs us also to dialogue with religions outside Abraham's stock. This dialogue offers a wealth of themes and challenges, when we think, for example, of Asian cultures deeply imbued with religious spirit, or of African traditional religions, which are a source of wisdom and life for so many people."

"At the root of the Church's encounter with world religions there is a discernment of their specific features, that is, of the way they approach the mystery of God the Saviour, the ultimate Reality of human life. Every religion, in fact, presents itself as a search for salvation and offers ways to attain it (*CCC*, n.843). Dialogue presupposes the certitude that man, created in God's image, is also the privileged *place* of his saving presence."⁶ Hence mission of proclamation is not just a matter of bringing God to peoples, but recognizing their being in the presence of the divine paternity and collaborating with them for the realization of the divine reign, the focus of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

4 Ibid p.295.

5 Ibid, p.296.

6 Ibid, pp.307-308.

b. Universal Presence of the Spirit

The Mission of the Church, like that of Jesus, is God's work, the work of the Spirit (RM 24). The presence and activity of the Spirit, nevertheless, is "universal, limited neither by space nor time" (RM 28), offering the human race "the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God" (RM 28). The Spirit's presence "is at the very source of man's existential and religious questioning", affecting "not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions" (RM 28). This universal activity of the Spirit makes the Church respect other religions, for "every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit" (RM 29). The universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the Church. Thus, the Spirit impels the Church to proclaim Christ and also "to discover these gifts, to foster them and receive them through dialogue" (RM 29).

Dialogue and Mission

a. Inter-religious Dialogue as Part of the Mission

This makes John Paul to acknowledge: "Inter religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions" (RM 55). In the context of the economy of salvation that comes from Christ in the Spirit, "the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in inter religious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*" (RM 55).

John Paul goes on to say: "The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people" (RM 55). Quoting *Lumen Gentium* 14, John Paul continues, "Indeed Christ himself while expressly insisting on the need for faith and baptism, at the same time confirmed *the need for the Church*, into which people enter through Baptism as through a door. Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation" (RM 55).

John Paul insists, however, that dialogue is not a tactical move of self-interest, but “[i]t is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills” (RM 56). Due to this activity of the Spirit, other religions “constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and to acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all” (RM 56).

If in *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II emphasizes the ecclesial and the evangelical perspective, his pronouncements and speeches elsewhere are more restrained and dialogue-centered based on the Divine paternity of all religions as well as from the understanding of mission as the realization of the Kingdom of God. Thus, in *Ecclesia in Asia* John Paul underlines, how the desire for dialogue “is not simply a strategy for peaceful coexistence among peoples; it is an essential part of the Church’s mission because it has its origin in the Father’s loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit” (n 29).

The Church “as the sacrament of unity of all mankind, cannot but enter into dialogue with all peoples, in every time and place” (EA 29). It is interesting that John Paul draws the Church’s attention to the fact that it is a “little flock” within the vast throng of humanity and at the same time the leaven in the dough of the world. Its efforts to enter into dialogue are directed to the followers of every other religious tradition, on the basis of the religious yearnings found in every human heart. “Ecumenical dialogue and inter religious dialogue constitute a veritable vocation for the Church” (EA 29).

It is a widely known fact that a crucial concern of the Roman Curia at the time of the Asian Synod as well for the post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation was the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia as the unique Saviour. Despite this eagerness to proclaim Jesus Christ as the *only* Saviour, John Paul refers to the spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence prevailing in Asia, and points out that proclamation in Asia has to be through Asia’s own spirit of harmony and complementarity (EA 6). For, the Holy Spirit has sown the seeds of truths among all peoples and their religions and enables these religions “capable of helping people, individually and collectively, to work against evil and to serve

life and everything that is good" (EA 15). These religions "have a clearly soteriological character," asserts John Paul (EA 2). Hence John Paul sees "the Spirit of God as the prime agent of the Church's dialogue with all peoples, cultures and religions" (EA 15).

Inter-religious dialogue, thus, "is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission *ad gentes*. Christians bring to interreligious dialogue the firm belief that the fullness of salvation comes from Christ alone and that the Church community to which they belong is the *ordinary means* of salvation (EA 31). Hence, for John Paul, Mission and Dialogue are two sides of the same coin of Church's service to the world. Therefore "it is important for the Church in Asia to provide suitable models of inter-religious dialogue – evangelization in dialogue and dialogue for evangelization – and suitable training for those involved" (EA 31).

b. Church the Servant of the Kingdom

Quoting Mark 1:14-15, John Paul reminds all how the proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom were the purpose of Jesus' mission (RM 13). Hence achieving a world of peace and security for all people everywhere, is part of the evangelizing mission of the Church, and it cannot be won by any one party, but by the whole international community. "Real peace," said John Paul, "will come only as a result of mutual understanding and respect between all the peoples of the region."⁷ On the occasion of the *Ad Limina* visit of the Bishops from the Western Region, India, John Paul reminded them of their call to evangelization and exhorted them "to continue to engage local leaders of other religious beliefs in an inter-religious dialogue which ensures greater cooperation."⁸ Such a dialogue with the local and national authorities can ensure that India continues to promote the basic human rights of all its citizens, he insisted.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Gregis* (2003) John Paul exhorts the bishops how inter-religious dialogue is "to be at the service of peace between peoples" (n 68). Different religious traditions possess the resources needed to overcome divisions and to build reciprocal friendship and respect. Similarly in the General Audience November 29, 2000, John Paul pointed out how interreligious dialogue is to be seen

8 "Address to the Indian Bishops from the Western Region," Ibid, p.337.

from the perspective of the divine activity in all, and further it expresses "the common efforts of all believers for justice, solidarity and peace."⁹

For John Paul the Christian faith that human salvation depends on the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ is not an obstacle to inter-religious dialogue, rather "it is precisely this hope which is the basis of inter-religious dialogue" (PG 68). On other occasions, John Paul makes this faith more dialogical in the sense he makes it a faith in the common divine Paternity. In his Message to Cardinal Cassidy for the XIII International Meeting of People and Religion, he wrote: "We must all be bolder on this journey, so that the men and women of our world, to whatever people or belief they belong, can discover that they are children of the one God and brothers and sisters to one another."¹⁰ Similarly, in his General Audience Address, 29 November 2000, he admonished the faithful how inter-religious is to be seen from the perspective of the divine activity in all and it expressed "the common efforts of all believers for justice, solidarity and peace."¹¹

In his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul spoke of the great challenge of interreligious dialogue to which the church must be committed in the new millennium for, "in the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism, which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread specter of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history" (n 55).

Addressing the Interreligious Assembly 28 October 1999 John Paul declared how "religious leaders have a vital role to play in nurturing that hope of justice and peace without which there will be no future worthy of humanity."¹² He asserted how promoting a culture of dialogue is part of the church's mission. The increased interest in dialogue between religions is one of the signs of hope present in our history. We Christians believe this is part of the promptings of the Holy Spirit leading to a clear sense of the universal brotherhood/sisterhood of all people, opening the way to reconciliation, harmony and peace.¹³

9 *Pro Dialogo* 106 2001/3, p.21.

11 *Ibid*, p.21.

13 *Ibid*, p.9.

10 *Pro Dialogo* , 106 2001/1, p.12.

12 *Pro Dialogo* 103 2000/1 p.7.

Conclusion

John Paul II seized Vatican II's initiative of openness and made space for other religions, and not just for the followers of other religions. The relation between the Church's mission of proclamation of Jesus Christ and that of inter-religious dialogue is to be situated in this context. The Church is bound to proclaim Jesus Christ, "to serve man by revealing to him the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ" (RM 2). At the root of Church's mission are the divine love and the realization of God's reign, of which the Church is the servant. The Kingdom can be achieved only in collaboration with all.

It cannot be denied that some of the teachings of John Paul, like, "dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation" (RM 55), can be disturbing to the followers of other religions. However, such statements are meant for clarity among the Catholics, and he never referred to such positions in his meetings with the followers of other religions. On the contrary, he insisted always on the one God who unites all and on God's reign of peace and unity. It is this openness of John Paul II that enabled the *Sarva-Dharma Sammelana* 28-30 November 1998 organized by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India at Bangalore, to affirm: "Each religion has to understand itself as an integral part of the other in the one universal process of the relationship between the human and the Divine."¹⁴ No wonder, John Paul II evangelized the world even more in his death by bringing together the whole world, including warring factions and persons.

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14 *Pro Dialogo* 102 1999/3, p.364.

The Approach of John Paul II to African Traditional Religion

Joseph Mattam

Joseph Mattam, Professor of Theology at Gujarat Vidya Deep, deals with Pope John Paul II's predilection for Africa. The Pope believed that not only the Church but Christ himself was African and saw great values in the religion of the African people. Africa, says the Pope, has something distinctive to offer to the world. The Pope, of all leaders of the 20th century, paid sustained attention to Africa and insisted that a continent of 450 million people should not be consigned to the outskirts of world attention and neglect.

"No world leaders in the last two decades of the twentieth century paid such sustained attention to Africa as John Paul II. After the enthusiasm of decolonization and the controversy over apartheid Africa became the forgotten continent. The only world institution that insisted that a continent of 450 million people could not be allowed to fall off the edge of history was the Roman Catholic Church"¹. John Paul II very often referred to cultures of peoples all over the world; similarly he spoke with respect of their traditional religions as carriers of culture. Culture and inculturation is an area that the Pope spoke of very regularly, especially in his relation to peoples from Asia and Africa². John Paul II had a great love for the people of Africa, especially for their religiosity. It is however true that he has not spoken at length at any time on the

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1. *Witness to Hope: the Biography of John Paul II*, by George Weigel, Cliff Street Books, New York, 1999, p. 372.
 2. Someone from Nairobi sent me a few photocopies of articles about the Pope's many visits to Africa; but unfortunately most of those pages do not have a proper reference as to their source I have referred to them as: Africa - Apostolic Pilgrimage.

theme of African Traditional Religion, but briefly referred to the theme in most of his talks to the Bishops of Africa and ensured that they took this theme seriously. The theme appears also in *Ecclesia in Africa*, the post Synodal document. Cardinal Arinze³ says that the Pope had during his many journeys to Africa⁴ given his authoritative approval and gave major guidelines for the African Bishops' pastoral approach to African Traditional Religion. Arinze was talking at the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar at its plenary meeting held at Lagos in 1987. My paper draws heavily on this document. The Pope has stressed the great responsibility which the pastors of the Church in Africa have in this matter⁵.

1. The Pope's love and respect for Africa its people, cultures and religions

On 8 May 1980 during his visit to Ghana, the Pope said to the President:

By my presence here today, Mr. President, I desire to honour the whole Ghanaian nation, with the wealth of its history, people, culture and achievement - in a word, with its authentically African and Ghanaian heritage and genius... So many of the values that are embodied in the culture of the African nations not only contribute to the building of each nation but can add to the enrichment of other nations and peoples as well. For Africa has something distinctive to offer to the world⁶.

The Pope went on to speak about values that Africa holds and can contribute to the world.

One of the original aspects of this continent is its diversity, but a diversity that is bound together by the undeniable unity of its culture: a vision of the world where the sacred is central, a deep awareness of the link between Creator and nature, a great respect for all life, a sense of family and of community that blossoms into an open and

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3. Francis Arinze and M.L. Fitzgerald: "Pastoral attention to African Traditional Religion (ATR)", pp 131-134 (Letter from the Secretariat for non-Christians - 25/3/1988). (Henceforth referred to as Arinze).
 4. Till 1993 the Pope had visited some 40 African states.
 5. Arinze, 133.
 6. Africa - Apostolic Pilgrimage, p. 267.

joyful hospitality, reverence for dialogue as a means of settling differences and sharing insights; spontaneity and the joy of living expressed in poetic language, song and dance. All these aspects manifest a culture with an all encompassing spiritual dimension. This is what makes the African culture unique... Culture is an expression of man, a confirmation of humanity.... Each nation brings to the family of nations its own cultural contribution... It is my hope... that all the citizens will loyally work together, without having to give up any of their cultural values⁷.

The Pope hoped that "the dynamism and virtues of its people can ensure a great future for Africa"⁸.

Inaugurating the Church's Synod for Africa, the Pope said:

The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life which leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe instinctively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the communion of saints? The people of Africa respect the life which is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life⁹.

The Pope was afraid, some of the traditional values of Africa are being lost; hence he came back to the theme of preserving their values. "Worthy African traditions are to be preserved... Preserve carefully your African roots. Safeguard values of your culture. You know them and are proud of them: respect for life, family solidarity and support for relatives, respect for the old, the sense of hospitality, judicious preservation of traditions, the taste for feasts and symbols, attachment to dialogue and palaver to settle differences..."¹⁰

The Pope believed that not only the Church but Christ himself was African. In answer to the objections raised by some, he said in Zaire, May 1980:

7. Africa - Apostolic Pilgrimage, 265-7.

8. Ibid. p.266.

9. "To the very roots of Africa": Inauguration of the Church's Synod for Africa, in *Catholic International*, 5 (1994) 6.p. 257-262, quote p. 258.

10. Africa - Apostolic Pilgrimage, 383-4.

By respecting, preserving and fostering the particular values and riches of your people's cultural heritage, you will be in a position to lead them to a better understanding of the mystery of Christ, which is to be lived in the noble, concrete and daily experiences of African life. There is no question of adulteration of the Word of God, or of emptying the cross of the power (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17), but rather of bringing Christ into the very centre of African life and of lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ, in the members of His Body, is Himself African¹¹.

The Pope recognised that Africa had been wronged. "If Africa has been so harmed by others throughout the course of history, we must ask ourselves the question: what needs to be done to change this state of affairs? To whom should we turn, and with what message, convincing, demanding, exhorting on behalf of God and on behalf of human rights and the common good of the entire human family, of which the sons and daughters of Africa are important members?"¹²

2. The Pope and African Traditional Religion

The underlying principle behind the Pope's attitude to Africa is the conviction that is very much alive and it continues to influence the people; secondly most of the African Christians come from this background, and finally it is helpful for the proclamation¹³.

The Pope sees great values in the religions of the people. He believed that Africans could become disciples of Christ more easily than the people of the Far East.

At this point it would be helpful to recall all the *primitive religions*, the *animistic religions* which stress ancestor worship. It seems that those who practice them are particularly close to Christianity, and among them, the Church's missionaries also find it easier to speak a common language. Is there, perhaps, in this veneration of ancestors a kind of preparation for the Christian faith in the communion of saints, in which all believers - whether living or dead - form a single community, a single body? And faith in the Communion of Saints is, ultimately, faith in Christ, who alone is the source of life and of holiness for all. There is nothing

11. Ibid. p. 244.

12. Ibid. p. 261.

13. "African Church in Dialogue", in *Catholic International*, Sept 1993, p. 406ff.

strange, then that the African and Asian animists would become believers in Christ much more easily than followers of the great *religions of the Far East*... As the Council also noted, these last religions possess the *characteristics of a system*... These are systems of worship and also *ethical systems*, with a strong emphasis on good and evil... Some of these peoples come from age-old cultures¹⁴.

Traditional Religions form the religious and cultural context from which most Christians in Africa come and in which they still live to a great extent. The vitality of this religion varies from country to country, but on the whole its influence still remains in Africa. This religion often involves the totality of life. So this is intimately connected with inculturation¹⁵. During his visit to Benin in 1993, the Pope called on all to cooperate in rebuilding the country. He called on adherents of Voodooism:

You have a strong attachment to the traditions handed on by your ancestors. It is legitimate to be grateful to your forebears who passed on this sense of the sacred, belief in a single God who is good, a sense of celebration, esteem for moral life and harmony in society... Your Christian brothers and sisters, like you, appreciate what is beautiful in these traditions because like you, they are sons and daughters of Benin... Christians, members of traditional religion, and Muslims are called to roll up their sleeves and work together for the good of the country. This work of solidarity among believers is important for integral development, justice and human liberation¹⁶.

According to the Pope there is an organic and constitutional link between religion and culture. That is why religious reality - respected in its specific meaning as the relationship of man with the transcendent - deserves to be studied profoundly in order to give proper attention to the values of religious traditions and the community bonds they support and to build a civilization capable of saving its soul. "All these reasons cause the Church to promote cultures everywhere... I understand the

14. John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Edited by V. Messori, Jonathan Cape, London, 1994, p. 82-3.

15. "African Church in Dialogue", in *Catholic International*, Sept 1993, p. 414.

16. "The Beninese Church in Mission", Papal Message to the Bishops of Benin (Cotonou, 3 Feb. 1993) *Catholic International*, April 1993, p. 153.

cry of certain Africans for authentic liberation and a just acknowledgement of their dignity, far from all racism and all continuations of political, economic or cultural exploitation"¹⁷.

2.1. Reasons for pastoral attention to or dialogue with African Traditional Religions

Traditional religiosity is still alive and dynamic. It still has influence on Christians. Where this is still alive, and people do not want to become Christians, dialogue with them is possible and useful. Many Christians at critical moments in their life have recourse to practices of the traditional religions, or join "independent churches" where they feel that certain elements of their culture are more respected. In some African countries the intellectuals are turning to the traditions. The Church respects the religions and cultures of various peoples and wishes to preserve all that is noble, true and good in their religion and culture. The better African Traditional Religion is understood by the heralds of the Gospel, the more suitable will be the presentation of Christianity to Africans. This can lead to the spirit of dialogue and collaboration; positive attitude to it is necessary. A study of it reveals the underlying needs of Africans, so that it becomes clear how Christianity can meet these needs. In this way the Church will be more at home in Africa, and Africans more at home in the Church.¹⁸

Elements of a non-Christian religion and the culture it influences can enrich Christian catechesis and worship and find in them their deepest fulfillment. To identify elements which Christianity could adopt, or adapt or ennoble and purify, or elements which it must reject, study is necessary (*Lumen Gentium* no 13). The Second Vatican Council urges deeper theological investigation in each major cultural area with a view to deeper evangelisation.

Theological investigation must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area, as it is called. In this way, under the light of the tradition of the universal Church, a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to the sacred Scripture, and which have been

17. John Paul II in Cameroon - 13 August 1985 Yaounde: "The Cry for Authentic Liberation". (An NC News Bulletin).

18. Arinze, 132f.

unfolded by the Church Fathers and teaching authority of the Church. Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living, taught by divine revelation¹⁹.

African Traditional Religion could be studied as to its name, its major objects of belief, especially God the creator, the fundamental rites in this religion, sacrifice, priesthood, prayer, marriage, the human soul, life after death, religion and moral life. Values such as the sense of the sacred, respect for life, sense of community, family spirit, a spiritual vision of life, authority as sacred, and symbolism in religious worship. The strength and influence of African Traditional Religion should also be studied. New religious movements are a mixture of traditional religiosity, Christianity and nationalism²⁰.

This objective and factual study will enable the Church to fulfill what was asked by *Gaudium et Spes* no 58: "The good news of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen man; it combats and removes the error and evil which flows from the ever-present attraction of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. It takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes and restores them in Christ"²¹.

For this study an inter-disciplinary approach is recommended. The Bishops Conferences decided to appoint a small competent group of people for pastoral attention to African Traditional Religions and to do this study in collaboration with the Bishops Conferences and with the proper dicasteries of the Vatican. The Bishops Conferences asked the Higher institutes of learning in Africa to help in this research. Seminaries and religious houses also were asked to arrange courses in Traditional Religions²². The bishops conclude that "the pastoral attention to African Traditional Religion which this letter is encouraging is a step in the direction of this reflection"²³.

19. *Ad Gentes* no 22, Arinze p. 132.

20. Arinze, p. 133-4.

22. *Ibid.* p. 134.

21. *Ibid.* p. 134.

23. *Ibid.* p. 132.

While encouraging such a study the Bishops do not fail to point out what key doctrinal points are to be kept in mind: the revealed nature of the message of Christ, the centrality of Christ, the irreplaceable role of the Bible and Tradition, the unity of the Church, the role of the successors of St. Peter, the communion of the local churches with the church of Rome²⁴.

The dialogue with African Traditional Religion is understood in two senses: with their adherents, who do not want to become Christians "dialogue is understood in terms of mutual understanding, respect, and mutual searching for the will of God". With those who have become Christians and who want to become Christians "dialogue is to be understood in the wider sense of a pastoral approach to traditional religion, with a view to a more adequate presentation of the Gospel, so that the Church will have deeper roots in the African soil"²⁵.

The Pope came back again and again to the theme of dialogue with non-Christian religions. He said in Cameroon: "As for dialogue with non-Christian religions - in this crossroads of religions which is Cameroon - it is certainly to be developed. It entails mutual esteem, recognition of others' values, and fraternal cooperation in everything to do with the common good in fidelity to one's own faith"²⁶.

In Feb 1993, in his speech to President Museveni and the people of Uganda, after he had greeted Christians of other denominations, he said:

To the followers of the other religious traditions too I offer my cordial greetings and good wishes... Yes, Africa, based on its noblest cultural values and traditions, can find in itself the strength and inspiration to develop in solidarity harmony and justice... I am convinced that Africa's well-being is supremely important to the world, for what you have to offer is decisive: a sense of man, a sense of God.²⁷

Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *"The Church in Africa: on the African Church's evangelizing Mission towards*

24. Ibid. p. 134.

25. Arinze, 133.

26. John Paul II in Cameroon - 13 August, 1985, Yaoundé, "The Cry for Authentic Liberation". (An NC News Bulletin).

27. In Feb 1993, in his speech to President Museveni and the people of Uganda.

the year 2000”²⁸ looked at the history of Christianity in Africa to emphasize its early start. Christian presence is from very early centuries, in Egypt and North Africa, the 2nd phase - South of Sahara from 15th and 16th centuries and the 3rd phase from 19th century. Then he went on to enumerate the cultural and religious values of the African people (no. 42f). Cultural values: a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred; the existence of God, and the spiritual world. The reality of sin, individual and collective is very present in the consciousness of the people; also of the need for rites of purification. The role of the family is held to be fundamental; love for life; respect for life (they love children); an acute sense of solidarity and community life. The whole village has to be present for any celebration.

With regard to African traditional religion, a serene and prudent dialogue will be able, on the one hand, to protect Catholics from negative influences which condition the way of life of many of them and, on the other hand, to foster the assimilation of positive values such as belief in a Supreme Being who is Eternal, Creator, Provident and Just Judge, values which are readily harmonized with the content of the faith (no. 67).

They can be seen as preparation for the Gospel, because they contain precious *semina Verbi* which can lead a great number of people to the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ. “The adherents of African traditional religion should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided. For this purpose, suitable courses in African traditional religion should be given in houses of formation for priests and religious” (no. 67).²⁹

The Pope saw these religions primarily in terms of their value for evangelisation. So he said: “The synod recognized the urgency of proclaiming the Good News to the millions of people in Africa who are not yet evangelized. The Church certainly respects and esteems the non-Christian religions professed by very many Africans, for these religions are the living expressions of the soul of the vast group of people” (no. 47). While respecting these religions, one must not fail to

28. *Ecclesia in Asia*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995. See also: *Catholic International*, 6 (1995), Dec. p. 561f. Also in the *Pope Speaks* 41 (1996), pp. 65-124.

29. *Catholic International* 1995, p. 572; the *Pope Speaks* 41 (1996) p. 91.

proclaim Jesus Christ. Quoting Paul VI, the Pope said: "neither respect nor esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ..." (no. 47).

The special assembly emphasized the importance of ecumenical dialogue with other Churches and ecclesial communities and of dialogue with African Traditional religion and Islam (no 49). "Certainly the Church on the continent can also play an important role in interreligious dialogue, above all by fostering close relations with Muslims and by promoting respect for the values of African Traditional Religion" (no 137). The Pope spoke of the importance of inculturation, respecting the cultures, and therefore of the traditional religion and its values.

The International Theological Commission in its letter on Faith and Inculturation³⁰ talks about popular piety. The document basing itself on the words of the Pope affirms the value of popular piety, often coming from the people's background and culture. "A local... church implanted in a non-Christian socio-cultural milieu must take seriously into account the religious elements of this milieu. Moreover, this preoccupation should be in accordance with the depth and vitality of these religious elements"³¹.

2.2. *Some elements of African Traditional Religion*

Four situations of African Traditional Religion can be detected:

1) Survivals - in spite of the impact of Islam and later of Christianity most of it has disappeared, yet some remain. 2) Popular religiosity - traditional practices have merged with Christian ones, especially in areas of family and personal life. Though much has disappeared, yet some remain as popular religiosity. 3) African Traditional Religiosity is part of the cultural heritage. 4) African Traditional Religion as an organized system: in some places African Traditional Religion is the still dominant religion and is practiced as a public, social organized system. In some places neo-pagan intellectuals are returning to this religion and reorganizing it according to modern principles³².

30. The International Theological Commission on Faith and Inculturation See *Origins* vol 18, no 47, May 1998, pp 800-807.

31. *Origins* Vol18 (May 1998), no. 47. p. 805.

32. "African Church in Dialogue", in *Catholic International*, Sept 1993, p. 416f.

The following aspects can be emphasized: *Religious sphere*: Africans have a widespread belief in a supreme God, unique and transcendent; they have a sense of the sacred and of the mystery; high respect for sacred places, times, person, etc. They believe in the afterlife as incorporated in myths and funeral ceremonies. The invisible world of spirits and ancestors is always present. Religion enfolds the whole of life; there is no dichotomy between life and religion. Ancestors mediate between God and humans. They believe in the efficacy of intercessory prayers. For them bodily purification is necessary before sacrifices etc; there are provisions for spiritual purifications also. Sins harm the public good; hence there are periodic purification rites. Worship requires a fundamental attitude of strict discipline and reverence. Pardon is final and is so acknowledged by all; an offence once forgiven is never recalled³³.

Ritual sphere: Rites form an essential part of social life; ancestors and the dead are invoked by rites; seasonal cycles and stages of life are sanctified by rites; the whole person (body and soul) is involved in worship; worship and sacrifice are the co-responsibility of all; symbols bridge the spheres of the sacred and the profane - hence a unified view of reality. Rites of passage, of initiation and of consecration are widespread. There are many rites of personal and communitarian purification; the sick are healed in rites which involve their families and community. Religious sacredness is preserved in ritual in dress and the arrangement of places of worship; some traditional blessings are very rich and meaningful.

Religio-Moral sphere: Respect for life; children are treasured; abortion is an abomination. Sacredness of human life is guarded by taboos and rituals; there is respect for the dignity of the human; each has his/her own inalienable *chi* (selfhood); to be faithful in undertakings is regarded as becoming a person; sin is perceived in both its personal and communal dimensions. Moderation in every sphere is inculcated especially in the use of alcohol; only adults may drink; to be drunk is shameful.

Religio-Cultural sphere: Tradition is handed over through stories, poems, proverbs, etc, the whole community is involved in the training

33. Ibid p. 416f: the following paragraphs are from this document.

of the young; moral education of youth is taken seriously; life has a festive dimension and is celebrated seriously; old folk are held in esteem; their wisdom is regarded as prophetic as they are able to give direction; silence is treasured as a value ; marriage is an alliance between families, cultural provisions are made to uphold its stability; youth is gradually introduced into life and society; blood alliances are very strong.

Religio-Social sphere: Hospitality is a duty and the most common value among Africans; great sense of solidarity and spirit of sharing between close relations; efforts are made to promote justice and peace within community; the nuclear and extended families have been very central; respect for authority; the poor and sick are taken care of; widows and orphans are looked after.

2.3. The negative aspects of African Traditional Religion

There are inadequate ideas on the object of worship, objectionable moral practices, degrading rites, polygamy, discrimination against women, and human sacrifices. Some situations may call for human sacrifice; ritual murder is not unknown. In some places twins are rejected as an abomination. Magic and divination are widespread. Humans are enclosed within a world of fear. God is regarded as too removed from life and hence not involved, so the cult of spirits is prevalent; an exterior social cult of the supreme God is often absent; salvation is seen as this worldly and uncertain; natural things like rivers are believed to have supernatural powers; evil is interpreted as a personal force - there is an "enemy" behind it; religion appears as a manipulation of God; some prayers invoke a curse; sacrifice is offered to spirits and ancestors; certain indecencies are permitted; clan consciousness is exclusive. Women's role is too restricted; widows are oppressed; some form of caste system still persists (*osu*); certain aspects of initiation seems to offend against Christian values and morals; secret cult are used to manipulate society; forced marriages are allowed and followed; witchcraft and sorcery are persistent; the sense of neighbour is often restricted.³⁴

Conclusion

The Pope does show interest in these religions, but he seems to look at them primarily from their usefulness for evangelisation, for helping

34. "African Church in Dialogue", in *Catholic International*, Sept 1993, p. 418f.

the proclamation better; this is unfortunate. Otherwise as we have seen above, he does have some good things to say about them. If we believe that God's Spirit is at work in religions and cultures of peoples, we need to have interest in them for their own sake, for the sake of the people, whether we succeed in proclaiming the Word to them or not. The Pope's eagerness is understandable, since Africa is the Church's hope for the future. The Catholic Church is growing most rapidly in Africa, where Catholics have virtually tripled in the last thirty years. In 1978 they numbered about 55 million, while in 2003 they have increased to almost 144 million³⁵. Some of the elements considered negative may be just social or cultural conditioning and need not be seen as negative. Some of the positive aspects enumerated above may not be true today in many places. Social crimes like robbery, murder, etc. are on the increase. Many people just do not marry at all, but live together. Hospitality is still a great value and I have personally experienced it during the years I have lived in Africa. I may end these reflections with the Pope's own hope and prayer expressed in Nairobi, to the bishops of Kenya on 7 May 1980: "The Holy Spirit of truth, who has implanted so many values in the hearts of the African people, will never cease to assist you as pastors in bringing the teachings of Jesus ever more effectively into the lives of your brothers and sisters"³⁶.

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35. Ishvani *Mission Scan* no. 31, July 2005.

36. Africa - Apostolic Pilgrimage, p. 242.

Pope John Paul II and the Jewish Traditions

Joseph Thondiparambil

Joseph Thondiparambil, who teaches Scripture at the Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Alwaye, clarifies the vision of John Paul II on the Church's relations with the Jews. In the past these were suffocated by the doctrine of super-sessionism leading to aggressive anti-semitism. With his visit to the Synagogue in Rome the Pope gave witness to a new culture of dialogue in the Church. He recognized the permanent validity of the Old Covenant and respects the Jews as elder brothers. He made clear how Jews and Christians could live in the same chosen family of the one God respecting and accepting each other.

It has been noted by the Jewish writers themselves that “no Pope in all of the history of the papacy has focused on the Church's relationship to Jews and Judaism as has John Paul II. He has been most outspoken of all Popes in renouncing Church teaching of contempt for Jews.”¹ In his many journeys, the “travelling Pope” made a point of meeting with representatives of the local Jewish communities wherever there was one, even if it was not large. He is the first Pontiff to visit a synagogue: the Synagogue of Rome in 1986. In 1993, he personally interceded in the Auschwitz convent controversy – which had become a major obstacle to the stability of Catholic-Jewish relations – by ordering the convent's nuns to relocate. In April 1994, he hosted a concert at the Vatican in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, and later that year, through his direct influence, the Holy See established full diplomatic relations with the State of Israel.

1 David M. Gordis, “John Paul II and the Jews.” in Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, (Eds) *John Paul II and Inter religious Dialogue* (Maryknoll: New York, Orbis Books, 1999) 125

Ever since his election to the Papacy in 1978, John Paul II's teachings regarding the Church's relationship with Judaism and the Jewish people have been primarily shaped by two factors. 1) The Vatican statements such as *Nostra Aetate* and the subsequent "Guidelines", and 2) the Pope's personal experiences in his native Poland.² "Indeed, probably no Bishop of Rome since St. Peter has lived in closer proximity to Jews than John Paul II"³ Here in this study we look into the theological framework in which John Paul II moved in his relationship and thinking about the Jews and Judaism.

The heritage of the Council

When we reflect on the theological ideas that moved the Pope in his approach to the Jews, we could single out the following points, which in fact are what he inherited from the Second Vatican Council. The documents on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions (*Nostra aetate*) are the Council documents that deal specifically with the Church and her relationship with other religions. The Church's role as the sacrament of Christ to bring about unity of all mankind is what lies behind all her actions with regard to other religions. *Lumen Gentium* teaches, "she is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity" (L.G.1) Hence the mission of the Church is an all encompassing one. But this mission to the Jewish faith is understood differently from the Church's mission to other religions.

Another key idea in the *Lumen Gentium* is the universality of the one people of God about which L.G.13 speaks.:

All men are called to belong to the people of God. Since the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world (Jn 18,36), the Church or people of God takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people by

- 2 The Polish background of the Pope has profoundly influenced his thinking on Judaism. About this point, Byron L. Sherwin, a Jewish scholar writes, "Because of the Pope's close personal associations with Jews during his formative years, and because of his painful empathic awareness of the plight of Jews during the Holocaust, particularly in Poland, the improvement of Catholic - Jewish relations has emerged as one of the leading non-Church issues that has preoccupied John Paul II during his papacy" Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, *John Paul I and Inter religious Dialogue*, 147-48
- 3 Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, *His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our time* (New York: Double Day, 1996) 30.

establishing that Kingdom. Rather does she foster and take to herself, in so far as they are good, the ability, resources, and customs of each people. This characteristic of universality which adorns the people of God is a gift from the Lord himself. By reason of it, the Catholic Church strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity with all its riches back to Christ its head in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

The Council proclaims the conviction that “all men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God, a unity which is harbinger of the universal peace it promotes. And there belong to it or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful as well as who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind. For all men are called to salvation by the grace of God” (L.G. 13)

It is in fact art.16 of L.G. that prepared the way for the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian religions. Special mention is here made of the Jews and Muslims because of the biblical basis of their respective faiths. About the Jews, the Council states: ” In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (Rom 9,4-5). On account of their fathers, this people remain most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls He issues (Rom 11,28-29). Here the Jewish people are acknowledged as the ones to whom God made the first covenant. The Old Testament roots of Christian faith are explicitly acknowledged. They are not a “cursed lot”; but “remain most dear to God”.

The numerous discourses that John Paul II has given on the occasion of his visits to the many countries of the world, the addresses to the many delegations of Jewish leaders and the special messages to the episcopal conferences throughout the world contain the Pope’s teachings about the attitude of the Church towards Jewish faith.⁴ But underlying the Pope’s teachings there is the basic orientation of the universal Church as given in art.4 of *Nostra Aetate*. As the Pope himself has admitted during his visit to the Jewish Synagogue in Rome⁵, “the decisive turning point in the relations between the Catholic Church and Judaism, and

4 A collection of such texts is found in Pontifical Council for Inter religious Dialogue, *Inter religious Dialogue. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church* (1963-1995). Francesco Gioia (Ed) Pauline Books & Media: Boston, 1997)

5 The Pope’s visit to the synagogue of Rome on 18th April 1986 was a historical

with individual Jews, is occasioned by this brief but incisive paragraph.”⁶ It was during this visit that the Pope spelt out in detail the Church’s understanding of the Jews and Judaism. He started with the call of Abraham, which is the beginning of the history of salvation both for the Jews and the Christians. The Pope was very particular about connecting his visit to the synagogue to the line of initiatives in the history of modern papacy starting with Pius XII and continued during the Pontificate of John XXIII and Paul VI.⁷

During his discourse in the synagogue the Pope pointed out three aspects of the Council’s teaching in a special way.

1.The Jewish Root of the Christian faith

The first point is that the Church of Christ discovers her “bond” with Judaism “by searching into her own mystery”. It means that the Church has her roots in Judaism. The Pope continues: “The Jewish religion is not extrinsic to us, but in a certain way intrinsic” to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion.” It is during this famous meeting that John Paul II called the Jewish brethren as “fratelli maggiori” – elder brothers. This teaching has been repeated by the Pope a number of times. In a discourse to the followers of the various religions in the United States at Los Angeles the Pope said, “I repeat the Second Vatican Council’s conviction that the Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his mercy established the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which has been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles (Rom 11,17-24)”⁸

event. As an author noted, “it was an epochal event, of great symbolic power and emblematic force as well as substantive importance” D.M.Gordis, John Paul II and the Jews, 126.

6 Pontifical council....74.

7 It is a much discussed question today, as how far Pope Pius XII got involved in the cause of the Jews during the Nazi persecutions.

8 John Paul II, *Insegnamenti* (1987),X/3,347-48; Also “Message to the Participants in the International encounter of Prayer for Peace held in Warsaw on the 50th Anniversary of the outbreak of Wold War II” Castel Gondolfo, in *Osservatore Romano*, September 11,1989

2. No collective guilt on the Jews

On the basis of the Council texts, a second point which the Pope made clear is that no ancestral or collective blame can be imputed to the Jews as a people for "what happened in Christ's passion", - not indiscriminately to the Jews of that time, nor to those who came afterwards, nor to those of today. Any alleged justification for discriminatory measures or, worse still, for acts of persecution is unfounded. It is a fact that in the past the Jews as a whole had been accused of deicide, and often the discrimination and persecution of the Jews were seen as theologically justified.⁹

The anti-semitism and the mass extermination of the Jews during the Nazi regime are seen by some writers as having distant roots in this attitude of the Christians.¹⁰ But the Pope has condemned anti-semitism in very powerful terms. In an address to the German ambassador to the Holy See the Pope said, "For Christians the heavy burden of guilt for the murder of the Jewish people must be an enduring call to repentance; thereby we can overcome every form of anti-semitism and establish a new relationship with our kindred nation of the Old Covenant."¹¹

The Pope has made it further clear that "it is not lawful to say that the Jews are repudiated or cursed" as if this is taught or could be deduced from the sacred Scriptures of the Old or the New Testament. St. Paul's teaching about the Jewish people that they are "beloved of God" who has called them with an irrevocable calling (Rom 11,28-29) is specially mentioned.

The permanent validity of the Jewish faith

This visit was intended as an affirmation that the Catholic faith and

9 In four of their seventy canonical enactments, the Fathers of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215 AD) dealt with the Jews: Christian princes must watch lest Jews exact too high interest of Christian debtors; baptized Jews may not observe Jewish customs; Jews may not appear in public during Easter week; Jews must give tithes on their houses and other property to the Church and pay a yearly tax at Easter no Christian prince may give an office to a Jew under pain of excommunication; Jews must wear a distinctive dress from their twelfth year to distinguish them from Christians. See the explanatory Notes, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, W.M.Abbott (General Editor) (New York: Guild Press,1966) 667

10 Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt* (New York:Holt, Rinehart and Winston,1964).

11 Eugene J.Fischer and Leon Klenicki, *Spiritual Pilgrimage*,120

Judaism be recognized and respected in its own identity, beyond any syncretism and any ambiguous appropriation. "Notwithstanding the Church's awareness of her own identity, it is not lawful to say that the Jews are "repudiated or cursed", as if this were taught or could be deduced from the sacred Scriptures of the Old or the new Testament"¹² In former times, "mission to the Jews" used to be specially emphasized. The integrity of Jews as Jews and of Judaism as a religion is now affirmed. No longer is Judaism depicted as an obsolete religion. No longer are Jews primarily defined as potential Christians.¹³ The permanent validity of the Jewish faith is underscored in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* too, a document published during the Pontificate of John Paul II. We read, "The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant"¹⁴

The link between the rejection of the displacement doctrine and the recognition of the integrity of Judaism was further strengthened in the Holy See's 1985 document "Notes on the Correct Way to present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church." It was issued to mark the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. The Guidelines direct to examine various liturgical, canonical, catechetical, educational and other texts which the Church utilizes and bring them in agreement with the Council teachings.

We get a clear vision of how the Pope looked at Judaism and the Jews also from his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. The following passage is illustrative:

"After my election to the See of Saint Peter, I have continued to cherish these deeply significant ties. On my pastoral journeys around the world I always try to meet representatives of the Jewish community.

12 Eugene J Fisher and Leon Klenicki, *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, 63

13 There is an interesting history to this exclusion. In the first draft of this document there was a reference to the mission to the Jews. But then the eminent Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel met with Cardinal Bea and Pope Paul VI and requested them to eliminate this reference. According to Heschel, the Pope personally crossed out a paragraph in which there was a reference to the conversion of Jews. The first draft was seen by many as an offensive text See Eugene Fisher, "Is there a Christian Mission to the Jews?" in Clark Williamson, (ed)., *A Mutual Witness* (St.Louis: Chalice Press, 1992), 15-33

14 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.839

But a truly exceptional experience for me was certainly my visit to the synagogue of Rome... During that memorable visit, I spoke of the Jews as *our elder brothers* in the faith. These words were an expression both of the Council's teaching, and a profound conviction on the part of the Church. The second Vatican Council did not dwell on this subject at length, but what it did affirm embraces an immense reality which is not only religious but also cultural...I am pleased that my ministry in the See of Saint Peter has taken place during the period following the Second Vatican Council, when the insights which inspired the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* are finding concrete expression in various ways. Thus the way two great moments of divine election – the Old and the New Covenants – are drawing closer together”.¹⁵

One can summarize the main ideas of the John Paul II's teachings on the Jews and Judaism in the following points: a repudiation of anti-Semitism; the rejection of super-sessionism, the doctrine that the Covenant with the Church supplanted the covenantal relationship of God with the Jewish people and the affirmation of the latter's continuing validity; and the vision of a “joint social action and witness to the one God and the reality of the Kingdom of God as the defining point of human history.”¹⁶

The Pope was not unaware of the difficulties in the way of a meaningful dialogue with the Jews, which he said “are the results of centuries of mutual misunderstanding, and also of different positions and attitudes, not easily¹⁷ settled, in complex and important matters. But there are areas where the Jews and the Christians could work together.” The Pope continues:

“We wish to recall first of all a collaboration in favor of man, his life from conception until natural death, his dignity, freedom, rights, and self development in a society which is not hostile but friendly and favorable, where justice reigns and where, in this nation, on the various continents and throughout the world, peace rules, the *shalom* hoped for by the lawmakers, prophets and wise men of Israel.”¹⁸

15 John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A.Knopf,1994)100.

16 Eugene G.Fisher, Pope John Paul and the Jews, 126.

17 David M.Gordis,John Paul II on Judaism, 75

18 By referring to the lawmakers, prophets and wisemen, the Pope was referring to the whole of the Old testament, which is divided by the Jews into *Torah*,

There is no trace of any "mission to the Jews" in the speeches of the Pope. Until recently it was advocated that the Jews were supposed to be converted to Christianity!¹⁹ In the common endeavor to find a solution to the contemporary world situation, the Pope adds:

"In doing this, I venture to say, we shall each be faithful to our most sacred commitments, and also to that which most profoundly unites and gathers us together: faith in the one God who "loves strangers" and "renders justice to the orphan and the widows"(Deut 10,18), commanding us also to love and help them (Deut 10,18; Lev 19,18.34). Christians have learned this desire of the Lord from *Torah*, which you here venerate, and from Jesus, who took to its extreme consequences the love demanded by the *Torah*."

Areas of collaboration

In his address to the Jewish community of West Germany on November 17, 1980, the Pope said: "The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God (cf. Rom 11,29), and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible. In this connection, the directives for the application of the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate* say: "The effort must be made to understand better every thing in the Old Testament that has its own, permanent value... since this value is not wiped out by the later interpretation of the New Testament, which, on the contrary, gave the Old Testament its full meaning, so that it is a question rather of reciprocal enlightenment and explanation."²⁰

"A second dimension of our dialogue – the true and central one – is the meeting between present day Christian Churches and the present day people of the Covenant concluded with Moses. It is important here "that Christians – to continue the post-conciliar directives – should aim at understanding better the fundamental elements of the religious tradition of Judaism, and learn what fundamental lines are essential for the religious reality lived by the Jews, according to their own understanding."²¹

Nebiim and Ketubiim

- 19 See the elaborate discussion on this point by Eugene Fisher, "Is There a Christian Mission to the Jews?" in Clark Williamson, (ed), *A Mutual Witness* (St.Louis:Chalice Press, 1992), 15-33
- 20 Pontifical Council for Inter religious Dialogue, *Inter religious Dialogue*, 78
- 21 Address to the Jewish Community, West Germany, November 17, 1980 in

A Dual Covenant Theory?

There are observers who hold that by his out-spoken words and deeds, Pope John Paul II has adopted a version of the "dual covenant theory, formulated in the early twentieth century by the German Jewish Philosopher Franz Rosenzweig.²² According to this view, there is a Jewish Covenant and a Christian Covenant. The Christian Covenant does not replace but continues and amplifies the covenant made with Israel. There is no longer a fissure between Judaism and Christianity, but rather a familial continuity and an organic relationship. But it should be noted that strictly from the theological point of view such a simplification of the Pope's position does not emerge. That is because the Church believes that Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, and thereby the Old Covenant itself. The Old Covenant is the necessary premise of the New Covenant, which is its inevitable fulfillment.

The experience of Holocaust, a vicarious suffering

John Paul II has always found great meaning and virtue in suffering. In the experience of the Jews during the War, the Pope sees multifaceted meaning. Such suffering he says is simultaneously vicarious: purifying, pedagogic, and redemptive. It is a way in which Jews can bear witness to their "irrevocable calling" by God. Addressing Jewish leaders in Warsaw in 1987, the Pope said: "It was you who suffered this terrible sacrifice of extermination. One might say that you suffered it also on behalf of those who were in the purifying power of suffering. The more atrocious the suffering, the greater the purification. The more painful the experience, the greater the hope... Because of this terrible experience, you have become a loud warning voice for all humanity, for all nations, all powers of this world, all systems and every person. More than anyone else, it is precisely you who have become this saving warning. I think that in this sense you continue your particular vocation."²³

Pontifical Council for inter religious Dialogue, *Inter religioius Dialogue*, 79

- 22 Byron L. Sherwin, *John Paul II's Catholic Theology of Judaism*, 140-141. For the details on the theory itself, see Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William H. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) 298-380; Maurice Bowler, "Rosenzweig on Judaism and Christianity: The Two Covenant Approach," *Judaism* 22 (1973) 475-82.
- 23 Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, 127 But there are authors who strongly object to such methods of finding meaning to the Holocaust event. According to them ascribing meaning is to offer justification,

Jerusalem, the Holy City for the Jews, Christians and Muslims

The position of the Holy See in the Arab- Israelis conflict has always been clear. The Church always recognized the right of both peoples to an independent homeland. In this context the status of Jerusalem is crucial. In this regard the Pope says: "I think especially of the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus, offering his life "has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility... bringing the hostility to an end (Eph 2,14-16). Before it was the city of Jesus the Redeemer, Jerusalem was the historic site of the biblical revelation of God, the meeting place as it were, of heaven and earth, in which more than in any other place, the Word of God was brought to men. Christians honor her with a religious and intent concern because there the word of Christ so often resounded, there the great events of the Redemption were accomplished: the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord. In the city of Jerusalem the first Christian community sprang up and remained through the centuries a continual ecclesial presence despite difficulties." "Jews ardently love her and in every age venerate her memory, abundant as she is in many remains and monuments from the time of David, who chose her as capital, and of Solomon who built the Temple there. Therefore they turn their minds to her daily, one may say, and point to her as the sign of their nation.

"The Muslims also call Jerusalem holy, with a profound attachment that goes back to the origins of Islam and springs from the fact that they have there many special places of pilgrimage. And for more than a thousand years have dwelt there, almost without interruption... The holy city, thereof, strongly urges peace for the whole human race, especially for those who worship the one Great God, the merciful Father of the peoples. But it must be acknowledged that Jerusalem continues to be the cause of daily conflict, violence and partisan reprisals."²⁴

There should be found, according to the Pope, with good will and farsightedness, a concrete and just solution by which different interests and aspirations can be provided for in a harmonious and stable, internationally guaranteed way, so that no party could jeopardize it. The

and this is least acceptable. Byron L. Sherwin, *John Paul II's Catholic Theology of Judaism*, 156

Holy See recognizes the existence of two peoples, the Israelis and the Palestinians. The Pope said, "I desire, therefore, to draw the attention of politicians, of all those who are responsible for the destiny of peoples, of those who are in charge of International Organization, to the plight of the City of Jerusalem and of the communities who live there. In fact, it escapes no one that the different expressions of faith and of culture present in the Holy City can and should be an effective aid to concord and peace."²⁵

The New Horizon

In order to appreciate fully the direction taken by the Church in its understanding Jews and Judaism it is helpful to look into her attitudes before the Second Vatican Council. It could be put as follows: Judaism had once been true, as it was rooted in a covenant made by God with the people of Israel. But Israel rejected the covenant. So God sent Jesus to redeem them. They rejected him too and crucified him, thus committing the most heinous crime – deicide. So God abrogated His covenant with them and they became an accursed people. In their place Church became the new Israel. The Church has a mission to the Jews. "In theological parlance aspects of this position came to be known as the 'supersessionist doctrine' and 'the displacement doctrine', that is, Christianity supersedes Judaism, and 'the New Israel' displaces the 'old Israel' as the covenanted people of God²⁶. Pope John Paul II corrected this traditional attitude and embraced the Jews as brothers and sisters in the covenantal relationship of God, thus opening new horizons of Church's encounter with Jews.

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- 25 John Paul II, *Redemptionis Anno* (Apostolic Letter) April 20, 1984, no.23
- 26 Byron L.Sherwin, John Paul II's Catholic Theology of Judaism, 141. For good summaries of the "displacement doctrine" see Franklin Little, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975)28-32, Rose Mary R. Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974); Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *A Blessing to Each Other* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996) 146-55.

John Paul II and Buddhism

Rosario Rocha

Rosario Rocha, who teaches systematic theology and Buddhism at Jnanadeepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, examines how John Paul II understands and interprets Buddhism. Some of the observations made by the Pope to the interviewer in the book *Crossing the Threshold* threw up a great controversy. However he has expressed great esteem for the Buddhist values of contemplation, self-abnegation, compassion and love of nature.

The Pilgrim Pope, late John Paul II, went into the world where people were. He had a charming way to engage the peoples of all religions in a creative, friendly, and fraternal dialogue. He has expressed his mind and mission in many different documents. History will evaluate his legacy, its effects on the Catholic Church and her relations with the world in the third millennium. In this paper an attempt is made to consider a small part of this legacy about his understanding of Buddhism, a religion founded by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. It is to be acknowledged that the late Pope John Paul II is the first among the Popes to write so much on Buddhism.

The Buddha himself was an itinerant teacher. Buddhism became quite missionary. It spread through most of Asia. Remarkable is the inculturation of Buddhism in the cultures of the people the missionaries took it to. We know of three main streams of Buddhism. They are Therevada in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Kampuchea and Laos; Mahayana in China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam; and Vajrayana or Tantrayana in Tibet and Mongolia. At the beginning of the 21st century there is a strong presence of Buddhists in some European countries as well. France has about 500,000 Buddhists, 200,000 in the United Kingdom, 70,000 in Germany, and 15,000 in Italy.

John Paul II had the opportunity to meet with Buddhists as he travelled to various countries as well as at the Vatican. Particularly his views on Buddhism published in his *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994) were perceived as quite controversial. We will note shortly that his legacy on Buddhism is limited.

The Pope's interpretation of the theology of religion enshrined in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council maintains a meaningful balance between the understanding of world religions, the common soteriological root, and faithfulness to the missionary effort of the Church. This attitude of the late Pope rekindles the hope of the Second Vatican Council of a Church actively engaged in a salvific dialogue with respect and esteem of the people of other religions. Religions, with their origin in cross-cultural contexts, the Pope understands will have their areas of convergence and divergences. The Pope expects the theological and other experts to explore those areas.

The meeting, at the invitation of John Paul II, of the leaders of the world religions at Assisi where they stood 'side by side to ask God for peace' is a resplendent light to a Church in dialogue. It was possible only because the Pope interpreted his role in a dialogue of religions as inspired by the Holy Spirit at work in God's universal salvific will (1 Tim. 2: 4).

John Paul II meeting Buddhists

As the source texts of the Pope suggest he certainly talks with the inspiration flowing from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. His addresses to the Buddhists cited below will hardly manifest anything adverse about Buddhism. The negative remarks about Buddhist are almost solely in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. The Editor of the book suggests that "the text, which will be published in Italy and simultaneously in all the major languages of the world, was examined and approved by the author himself." The comment of the interviewer was that Buddhism offers "a doctrine of salvation" that seems increasingly to fascinate many Westerners as an "alternative" to Christianity or as a sort of "complement" to it, at least in terms of certain ascetic and mystical techniques. The text of the Pope's answer was published months before his visit to a Buddhist country, Sri Lanka. The Buddhists did not appreciate the mostly negative tone of the Pope's opinion. Catholics sensed those views to be an obstacle to their dialogue.

The Pope's legacy about Buddhism is presented now in his words with his emphasis in *italics*.

To a Buddhist-Shintoist Delegation: ¹

"Venerable friends, representatives of Buddhism and Shinto in Japan,

I am very happy to welcome you today. I greet you (sic) first of all as sons of the noble and industrious people of Japan. Your country has made outstanding progress in many fields. At the same time it has remained attached to its own lifestyle, with its emphasis on respect, harmony and art.

The Catholic Church expresses her esteem for your religions and for your high spiritual values, such as purity, detachment of heart, love for the beauty of nature, and benevolence and compassion for everything that lives.

It gives me great joy to know that you have come here to carry forward your dialogue and collaboration with the Holy See's Secretariat for Non-Christians. The themes you are discussing together, each from the standpoint of his own religion, are the relationship between man and nature and the relationship between religion and culture. I am deeply convinced that these are themes of great importance for the future of our world. Indeed, this conviction of mine is reflected in my first Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*. Be assured, then, that I shall follow this dialogue and subsequent ones with interest and appreciation.

On this earth we are all pilgrims to the Absolute and Eternal, who alone can save and satisfy the heart of the human person. Let us seek his will together for the good of all humanity. Thank you for your visit. I hope your stay in Rome will be a happy one. Please convey my cordial greetings and blessings to your families and friends in Japan."

To the Leaders of Traditional Religions of Korea (Soeul, May 6, 1984) Excerpts ²:

"The Catholic Church is endeavouring to engage in *friendly dialogue* with all the great religions that have guided mankind throughout history. This we shall continue to do, so that our mutual understanding and collaboration may increase, and so that the spiritual and moral values

1 Bulletin 43, 1980, p.6

2 Lósserv. Rom. 20, 1984, p.7

we uphold may continue to offer wisdom and inner strength to the men and women of our time.

In fact, religions today have more than ever *vital role to play* in a society in rapid evolution such as Korea. In a sense, just as the individual must find his true self by transcending himself and strive to achieve harmony with the universe and with others, so too must a society, a culture, the community of human beings, seek to foster the spiritual values that are its soul. And this imperative is all the more urgent, the deeper the changes that affect life today.

In this regard, the world looks to Korea with particular interest. For the Korean people throughout history have sought, in the great ethical and religious visions of *Buddhism and Confucianism*, the path to the renewal of self and to the consolidation of the whole people in virtue and in nobility of purpose. The profound reverence for life and nature, the quest for truth and harmony, self-abnegation and compassion, the ceaseless striving to transcend – these are among the noble hallmarks of your spiritual tradition that have led, and will continue to lead, the nation and the people through turbulent times to the haven of peace.

Our diversity in religious and ethical beliefs calls upon all of us to foster genuine *fraternal dialogue* and to give special consideration to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them. Such concerted effort will certainly create a climate of peace in which justice and compassion can flourish.

We Catholics have just celebrated the Jubilee Year of the Redemption. In that period of grace we have endeavoured to live *the gift of reconciliation* granted us in Christ and have made efforts to reconcile ourselves with God and with our fellow man. Would it not be a good thing indeed, if also between believers of different traditions and between religions themselves a similar meeting of minds and hearts could be realized by our common goodwill and our duty to serve the human family's well-being?

When, the Catholic Church proclaims Jesus Christ and enters into dialogue with believers of other religions, she does so in order to bear witness to his love for all people of all times – a love that was manifested on the cross for the reconciliation and salvation of the world. It is in this spirit that the Church seeks to promote deeper fellowship with all peoples and religions.

May I address a particular greeting to the members of the Buddhist tradition as they prepare to celebrate the festivity of the Coming of the Lord Buddha? May your rejoicing be complete and your joy fulfilled..."

The response of the Pope about Buddhism was in answer to the interviewer's observation:³ Buddhism offers "a doctrine of salvation" that seems increasingly to fascinate many Westerners as an "alternative" to Christianity or as a sort of "complement" to it, at least in terms of certain ascetic and mystical techniques.

Buddhist Soteriology⁴

"The *Buddhist doctrine of salvation* constitutes the central point, or rather the only point, of this system. Nevertheless, both the Buddhist tradition and the methods deriving from it have an almost exclusively *negative soteriology*." The Pope seems to list his own reasons for the above statement. 1) "The enlightenment experienced by Buddha comes down to the conviction that the world is bad, that it is the source of evil and of suffering for man". 2) "To liberate oneself from this evil, one must free oneself from this world, necessitating a break with the ties that join us to external reality – ties existing in our human nature, in our psyche, in our bodies." 3) With such a liberation we "become indifferent to what is in the world." 4) He questions whether "we draw near to God" in the "enlightenment." 5) "Buddhism is in large measure an *atheistic system*." 6) "The fullness of such a detachment is not union with God, but what is called nirvana, a state of perfect indifference with regard the world." 7) "*To save oneself* means, above all, to free oneself from evil by becoming *indifferent to the world, which is the source of evil*."

Buddhist Mysticism

The Pope comments on "attempts to link this (Buddhist) method with the Christian mystics have been made."⁵ He notes that "in Eastern Asia these classic texts- *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul* - of Saint John of the Cross have been, at times, interpreted as a confirmation of Eastern ascetic methods. But this Doctor of the Church does not merely propose detachment from the world. He proposes

3 Crossing the Threshold of Hope (CTH) p.84

4 The following quotations are from CTH, pp. 85-87

5 CTH. 86

detachment from the world in order to unite oneself to that which is outside of the world— by this I do not mean nirvana, but a personal God ... Therefore, despite similar aspects, there is a fundamental difference.”

The Pope looks for confirmation of his views in “The Second Vatican Council has amply confirmed this truth. To indulge in a negative attitude toward the world, in the conviction that it is only a source of suffering for man and that he therefore must break away from it, is negative not only because it is unilateral but also because it is fundamentally contrary to the development of both man himself and the world, which the Creator has given and entrusted to man as his task”- then cites *Gaudium et Spes* 2.⁶

“For this reason it is not inappropriate *to caution* those Christians who enthusiastically *welcome certain ideas originating in the religious traditions of the Far East* – for example, techniques and methods of meditation and ascetical practice.... Here we need to recall, if only in passing, the brief but important document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ‘on certain aspects of Christian meditation.’ Here we find a clear answer to the question “whether and how [Christian prayer] can be enriched by methods of meditation originating in different religions and cultures.”⁷

Some Responses

Jose Ignacio Cabezon, a Buddhist responds to John Paul II’s views of Buddhism.⁸ A few of his remarks for the benefit of the reader: Such a position regarding Buddhism clearly represents a departure from Church doctrine in recent decades... But “the evil” that is the source of this suffering, though a part of the world, is neither the world itself, nor is it caused by the world... The Buddhist sources claim that love for beings in the minds of buddhas (sic) is so profound that it literally causes them to become embodied, to enter the world for the sake of helping beings... John Paul II also seems disturbed at seeing Western Buddhist monks in the entourage of the patriarch of Thailand.⁹ To this annoyance I suppose, that in his age of radical pluralism there is no longer any such thing as the *Christian West*.

6 CTH.87-89.

7. On Christian Meditation , 15.10.1989. p.3

8 Sherwin and Kasimov (ed), John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue, Orbis, NY, 1999, pp113-122

9 CTH. 85.

Ven. Bhikku Bodhi, a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, writes-¹⁰ "In criticizing Buddhism for its so-called "negative soteriology," Pope John Paul is echoing an evaluation of the Buddhist teaching that was widely disseminated by Christian missionaries in the 19th century. This view depicted Buddhism as a bleak doctrine of world-negating escapism aimed at person annihilation in a nameless nothingness. Serious scholars of Asian religions, including open-minded Christians, have long recognized this characterization of Buddhism to be erroneous."

In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council's teaching and the Pope's own search for understanding other religions, the appropriate way would be to understand the other religions and their practices as their adherents understand them. We would have to do this in a truly Christian charity to advance a meaningful inter-religious dialogue.

The sincere encouragement from the Pope to Catholic and Buddhist monks in dialogue, in their practice of meditation/contemplation and shared life, is a source of inspiration. Above all else the Pope was true to the legacy of calling the Church and religions to dialogue in the spirit of his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, particularly in the latter's encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, and according to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. The Pope's prayer at Assisi with leaders of world religions was for the gift of peace to our world. He regarded it as a concern where religions have a significant role.

Addressing the Buddhists

To Japanese Buddhists ¹¹: "I pray that the Spirit may further inspire the inter-religious dialogue in Japan, especially that on the spiritual level"

To the participants of the East -West Spiritual Exchanges (of Zen and Christian monks:¹² "Through the attentive listening and the mutual respect which characterize these exchanges inter-religious dialogue can reach an increasingly more profound level."

To the Tibetan Buddhist monks and some Benedictine monks¹³: "Your dialogue at the monastic level is truly a religious experience, a meeting

10 Several scholars and Buddhist monks have written their views on the reference to Buddhism in CTH by the Pope. Their views are published in: Dialogue, New Series Vol.22, 1995

11 Bulletin, 43, 1980, p.15.

12. Bulletin, 67, 1988, p.5

13 Bulletin, 73, 1990, p.17

in the depths of the heart, animated by the spirit of poverty, mutual trust and profound respect for your own traditions. It is an experience which cannot always be translated adequately into words, and which often can best be expressed in prayer-filled silence.”

To the Leaders of Other Religions at Chennai (Madras), India (1986)¹⁴:

“Dialogue between members of different religions increases and deepens mutual respect and paves the way for relationships that are crucial in solving the problems of human suffering. Dialogue that is respectful and open to the opinions of others can promote union and a commitment to this noble cause. Besides, the experience of dialogue gives a sense of solidarity and courage for overcoming barriers and difficulties in the task of nation-building.”

As mentioned earlier, John Paul II has left us a significant legacy about theology of religion, Buddhism and inter-religious dialogue. A genial act of faith manifested the Pope as living and practicing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council was the call to the Leaders of World Religions to a prayer meeting at Assisi. The Pope genuinely appreciated the significance of inter-religious dialogue when he told the Tibetan Buddhist monks: “Your dialogue at the monastic level is truly a religious experience, a meeting in the depths of the heart, animated by the spirit of poverty, mutual trust and profound respect for your own traditions. It is an experience which cannot always be translated adequately into words, and which often can best be expressed in prayer-filled silence.”¹⁵ However, his views on Buddhism left a sort of misunderstanding in an otherwise focussed theology of religions. John Paul II’s voluminous writings will keep those interested in his legacy engaged for years.

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14 Bulletin 62, 1986, p.14

15 Bulletin, 73,1990, p.17

John Paul II and India

The Ways and the Values To Transform India

A. Alangaram

In 1986 John Paul II visited India as a spiritual pilgrim. In his speeches and sermons he profusely quoted from the sages and Scriptures of India, addressed the socio-cultural issues of the country and showed ways of integral human liberation. At one time he emotionally called out: let India speak, let the world listen! Alangaram, who teaches contextual theology at Arulkadal, Jesuit Regional Theology Centre, Chennai, presents here the main themes of the allocutions of John Paul in India.

1. Introduction: Pilgrim and Ambassador of God's Love

Reading the addresses, homilies and speeches given by Pope John Paul II during his visit to India in 1986, we find that he had come to India as a pilgrim, a pilgrim of peace with an open mind and heart to experience the very soul of our country, a pilgrim to be with the fellow-pilgrims of other religions, "to listen and learn from the men and women of this noble nation"¹. He explicitly mentioned that the purpose of his visit to India as having "both a religious and a human dimension"². He elaborated it further by saying that he had been interested in the various cultures of India, had genuine respect and sincere interest in all the religions of India, an admiration for the Indian Constitution that promotes religious liberty and genuine spiritual values and honours human dignity with sacred dimension.

The Pope appreciated India's national and international vision of promoting equality with human dignity, unity in diversity, promoting economic development within the country especially taking care of the

1 *The Pope Speaks to India* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1986), p. 14.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

poor and the needy and peace and harmony through dialogue both within and outside the country. Above all he came with the message of God's love³ and to express his deep sentiments of fraternal love and respect for all the Indian people and gave them the assurance that the Church in India is and will be contributing to the promotion of justice, love and peace and to the unity of the country and in many aspects of her life.⁴

In this article I try to present the Pope's understanding of India in a global context, and the Indian Church in a pluri-religious, multi-cultural context with people who long for real salvation/liberation from sin and its consequences. The Pope suggested inculturation, interreligious dialogue and ecumenism as ways to transform India and the world. Above all he proclaimed the values of the Gospel inviting all Indians to become reconciled among themselves, with God and the universe.

2. The Context of India and the World

The Pope said that in today's context we have neither solved traditional problems like poverty, hunger and disease nor are we free from new additional problems like lopsided development that favours some and makes others deprived and dependants. There is also a constant threat to our lives through weapons of mass-destruction that makes us live in anxiety and insecurity day after day⁵.

As a universal pastor he had visited many nations and had rich experience of peoples' struggle for life and human dignity. Thus touched and moved by his own personal experience he said: "Nations are divided between East and West, North and South, friend and enemy. And within the borders of every country, within the borders of India too, can be found opposing groups and factions, rivalries arising from prejudice and ideologies, from historical stereotypes and ethnic barriers and from a variety of other factors, none of which are worthy of our human dignity."⁶ Being fully aware of what is going on in the world, he said that the contemporary world is "as never before in danger because of man's mistake and offences"⁷.

He drew the attention of Christians in India particularly to the plight of the poor. The poor are those who are blind, captive and oppressed. The term poor also includes all people who are deprived of the basic necessities of life, millions of refugees who lost their home and land and millions of people who remain powerless because of unjust situations

3 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 65.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 64,

and under-development.⁸ The liberation/salvation to the poor in India would mean a total freedom from all that oppress them socially, politically, religiously and economically.

In this context of the world, the Pope invited all of us in India, "to return over and over again to *the central issue of the world, which is man*: as a creature and child of God; man bearing within his heart and soul the image and likeness of God; man destined to fulfill his calling to live for ever"⁹.

3. Sinful Context

All of us aware the Pope said that "man at one time turned against the Creator through sin, but that God in his mercy did not abandon mankind. Rather he revealed his loving plan of salvation"¹⁰. He made an analysis of all that he had encountered and pointed out that "*the ultimate reason* why the world is the scene of divisions, tensions, rivalries, blocs and unjust inequalities, instead of being a place of genuine fraternity, *is sin*, that is to say, human moral disorder"¹¹. Thus we today live in "a world, which is all too familiar with selfishness and hedonism, with greed for money, prestige and power"¹².

4. Ways to transform India

Looking at India and the world on the one hand the Pope had appreciated them for all that is positive and life-promoting in them. On the other hand he did not fail to point out the various ills of modern times. They suffer from not only individual sin but also social, historical and structural sin. Therefore the Pope had proposed inculturation, interreligious dialogue and ecumenism as a way of life for the Church in India. This is the way that the Church can follow Jesus the Lord and get involved in God's mission of saving India and the world.

4. 1. Inculturation

The Pope expressed openly that he was deeply interested in the various forms of Indian culture. He emphasized the Church's role in inculturation. The Church has the mission of bringing the good news of Jesus to all cultures. Although the mystery of Incarnation took place in a particular

8 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 70; p. 77: "When sin sprang up between the human heart and the holiness of God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – the path to this fullness of life which is from God could be reopened only through *the Redemption*."

11 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

culture, from the beginning it was destined for all cultures. When the word of God falls on every culture like the seeds on the ground and begins to take root in it, it will appreciate all that is good, human and well pleasing to God and at the same time it will also challenge and purify all that is inhuman and displeasing to God. Thus inculturation means that it "is the task of translating the treasure of faith, in the originality of its content, into the legitimate variety of expression of all the peoples of the world"¹³. Moreover it should be kept in mind that the goal of inculturation is not to dominate but to serve. Hence the Pope said: "The Gospel has come *in order to be incarnate in your cultures without doing violence to them*. In this process Christian tradition both enriches and is in turn enriched by this contact with the many values that are preserved in the hearts of the peoples..."¹⁴.

The Pope also made mention of liturgical inculturation, which has to precede both the doctrinal verification and pastoral preparation of the faithful. And all liturgical implementations have to be effected with pastoral care and concern and pastoral understanding and charity.¹⁵

4. 2. *Collaboration with Religious Groups*

Right from the beginning of his visit the Pope expressed his keen interest in all religions of India with an openness to enter into dialogue with them for fruitful collaboration '*on behalf of man and his spiritual and material well-being*'. The Pope considered interreligious dialogue as an important and serious part of apostolic ministry in India. It was the call of the Lord Himself, to do everything possible to make dialogue the commitment of the Church. Further he observed that the dialogue is a means to express the Church's respect, meekness, esteem and trust to other religious groups so that our encounter with them excludes rivalry, hatred and suspicion. And the supreme criterion of interreligious dialogue, the Pope said, was charity and truth.¹⁶

In and through interreligious dialogue we offer not only our friendship and service to other religious groups but we also listen to them, learn

13 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

14 *Ibid.*, 73. Also ref. p. 78: "In offering to others the Good News of the Redemption, the Church strives to understand their culture. She seeks to know the minds and hearts of her hearers, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and dreams. Once she knows and understands these various aspects of culture, then she can begin the dialogue of salvation; she can offer respectfully but with clarity and conviction, the Good News of the Redemption to all who freely wish to listen and to respond. This is the evangelical challenge of the Church in every age."

15 *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

from them '*the spiritual, moral and cultural values enshrined in their different religious traditions*' and share with them the good news of Jesus Christ who spoke on the transcendent destiny of man as a child of God, about truth, freedom, justice, forgiveness, service, peace and love.¹⁷

In the Pope's homilies, prayers and speeches we find certain clear directions given to us who live in India, a land of pluri-religions and multi-cultures. These directions certainly reflect the option of Jesus and the values of the Gospels. They are concern for human life, human dignity, human rights, justice and development, justice and peace, freedom, reconciliation, service, suffering, human solidarity, truth and love, salvation and liberation. To create a new world based on the values of the gospel he had proposed to us as the best means dialogue with cultures and religions. The Pope had reaffirmed that the Catholic Church could join together with the other religions '*in the construction of a new civilization of peace and love* based on commitment to the process of development, which lead to greater justice for all and in a special way to the poor, and the needy¹⁸.

The Pope perceived that interreligious collaboration had to help us at two levels: First to preserve all human rights including the right to worship God and to profess that faith in public; and second "to struggle to eliminate hunger, poverty, ignorance, persecution, discrimination and every form of enslavement of the human spirit. Religion is the mainspring of society's commitment to justice, and inter-religious collaboration must reaffirm this in practice"¹⁹.

4. 3. *Collaboration with the Churches*

The Pope declared that he had come to India "to proclaim ... *the unity which Christ wills* for all his followers - a unity modelled on the unity of life and love that exists in the Most Holy Trinity"²⁰. So he announced "unity is the will of God"²¹. In his address to the heads of the Christian communities, the Pope said that "*ecumenical responsibility* ... must be a principal pastoral priority for the Catholic Church"²². Unity

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 29; p. 79: "While esteeming the value of these religions, and seeing in them at times the action of *the Holy Spirit* who is like the wind which '*blows where it will*' (Jn 3: 8), the Church remains convinced of the need for her to fulfil her task of offering to the world *the fullness of revealed truth*, the truth of the Redemption in Jesus Christ".

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65. 19. *Ibid.*, p. 48-49. 20. *Ibid.*, p. 27. 21. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

in the profession of faith is the basis of ecumenism for which we need to have theological dialogue that can make clear to us those questions that keep us all divided.²³ In all the churches we have the poor, the middle class and the rich. However following the model of Jesus the servant (Phil 2, 7), the churches are “required to make a special effort so that *the poor feel fully at home*”²⁴ in them. And they “must be willing to walk the paths of the dispossessed and those who seek after justice”²⁵.

In his address of the Syrian Orthodox at Kottayam the Pope spoke on the importance of unity of the churches at the local levels: “Ecumenism on the local level has decisive importance for the general promotion of the unity of all Christians. Unity is a distinctive mark of the Christian community. Division in its various expressions tarnishes it, sometimes compromises it.”²⁶ Moreover he said that Ecumenical dialogue “needs always to be sustained by, and expressed in efforts of *collaboration, common witness* wherever possible, and above all *fervent prayer and change of heart*”²⁷. It was the desire of the Pope that all Christians in India come together and work towards unity of the Churches.

5. Values to transform India

What make inculturation, interreligious dialogue and ecumenism more relevant and meaningful to us in India are the Reign of God and its values. The Pope spoke of a number of human and Gospel values, and invited us to live them. Thus he had shown us that another world is possible. The following are some of Gospel values that were stressed in his homilies, speeches and addresses.

5. 1. Human life, Human dignity and Human rights

The Pope pointed out more emphatically: “Discrimination based on race, colour, creed, sex or ethnic origin must be rejected as totally incompatible with human dignity.²⁸” What is important for India and the world today, he said, is the spiritual vision of man, which values human life, human rights and human dignity. This vision gives man a new understanding of himself, the world and God. Further it enables him, generation after generation, to shape and mould himself, based to a great extent on ethical values that are preserved in India, such as “a

23 *Ibid.* Also ref. p. 129: “It is my hope that shortly our Churches will find new and effective means of going forward together in theological dialogue and in pastoral collaboration.”

24 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

spirit of fraternal charity and dedicated service, forgiveness, sacrifice and renunciation, remorse and penance for moral failings and patience and forbearance"²⁹.

The Pope said: "What is at stake is the well-being of all human society - the building up of an earthly city that will already prefigure the eternal one and contain in initial form the elements that will for ever be part of man's eternal destiny"³⁰. To bring about equality in a society like India and even in the whole world with human dignity and fraternal solidarity of all human beings is only possible when all religions take upon their shoulder the horizontal responsibility of loving one's neighbour seriously.

Appreciating the true testimony of so many religious men and women the Pope said, "true men and women of religion have always been moved by a powerful and active compassion for the poor and the suffering"³¹. The expectation of the Catholic Church from the brothers and sisters of other religions is "*to defend and promote the spiritual and moral well-being of your people*, in the common cause of safeguarding and fostering human dignity, social justice, peace and freedom in the world"³². The Pope also perceived the moral poverty³³ in the modern world, which threatens human freedom and destroys human dignity.

5. 2. *Service of Justice and Development*

The Pope said: "I wish to encourage the *Catholic educators of all India* to make their schools and centers of higher education ever better instruments at the service of justice, development and harmony in social life, inspiring an ever-increasing awareness of the vocation to serve the integral well-being of people, *especially the young and the poor*"³⁴. The Pope encouraged every Christian in India to participate in the civil life and contribute to its progress with the spirit of love and service.³⁵

Referring to *Gaudium et Spes*, 39, the Pope stated: "The Church teaches that 'earthly progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God to the extent that it can contribute to the better ordering of human society'"³⁶. He also quoted his predecessor Paul VI who said that there is a close link between evangelization and development (*Evangelii*

29 *Ibid.*, p. 45. 30. *Ibid.*, p. 49. 31. *Ibid.*, 32. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 81: *Moral poverty*, the Pope explains, "... the poverty of those who live without perceiving the meaning of life, the poverty of a misguided or erroneous conscience, the poverty of broken homes and separated families, the poverty of sin".

34 *Ibid.*, p. 66-67. 35. *Ibid.*, p. 153. 36. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Nuntiandi, 31). Saving people from famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in national and international commercial exchanges, or from any kind of oppression is a constitutive element of proclaiming the Gospel. Because in her faith-praxis repeatedly "the Church proclaims her conviction that the *core of the Gospel is fraternal love springing from the love of God*. The proclamation of the new commandment of love can never be separated from efforts to promote the integral advancement of man in justice and peace"³⁷.

5. 3. Human Solidarity

The Pope invites the intellectuals, thinkers, writers, scientists, artists, philosophers and in a special way all men and women of good will 'to join together in a new solidarity' and take responsibility for the welfare and well-being of Indian nation. It means for the Pope that the people of India need "to respond concretely to the challenges of development and assistance, especially to the poorest"³⁸ and "to help change those attitudes and structures which are responsible for man-made poverty and oppressive suffering"³⁹. The baptismal unity among Christians and our solidarity with Hindus, Muslims and other religious traditions are the foundations on which we can build a world based on truth, justice, love and peace⁴⁰. In his address to the leaders of other religions in Madras, the Pope said that a global solidarity today has become a compelling necessity for all of us together to face the various challenges of our times⁴¹. To serve people, especially the young and the poor the Pope recommends a twofold fidelity. The first is the fidelity to the Gospel message of universal brotherhood, sisterhood and solidarity and the second is the fidelity to Indian cultures as it is expressed in terms of reverence to nature, search for truth in the depth of human spirit, integration of life.⁴²

5. 4. Human Suffering

In his address to the religious leaders in Calcutta, the Pope said that: "In every country of the world, in every city, town and village, ... religious leaders ... must be sensitive to the sufferings and needs of humanity"⁴³. In his homily at mass in the Indira Gandhi stadium, the Pope contemplated on the Cross of Christ and made a meaningful interpretation of it in Indian context. To him the poor in India suffer the cross of poverty, cross of hunger and the cross of every other suffering. The reason all

37. *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 63-64.

of us know that the people are poor not because they want to be poor but because they are made poor and kept illiterate. Children and people are hungry not because we do not have sufficient food production but because the food is not shared and there are humanly created situations which are directly responsible for many other suffering. Knowing these fully well the Pope also had said that all these crosses and suffering, could be transformed.⁴⁴

Therefore the Pope invited all Christians and men and women of good will to join hands with the poor and fight against poverty. Struggling with the poor and taking efforts to relieve them from poverty and suffering are all part of evangelization. To keep ourselves away from the poor and their struggles "would be to betray the work of evangelization; it would be infidelity to the example of Jesus who came 'to preach the good news to the poor' (Lk 4:18); it would be in effect a rejection of the consequences of the Incarnation, in which 'the Word became flesh' (Jn 1:14)"⁴⁵. Despite poverty, oppression, deprivation and suffering in India, "*the power of truth will prevail – the truth about God, the truth about man. The power of truth is invincible! 'Satyam èva jayate – Truth alone triumphs'*", as the motto of India proclaims"⁴⁶.

5. 5. Human Reconciliation

In his homily during a mass in Ernakulam, Kerala, the Pope preached on different forms of reconciliation, 'reconciliation within man/woman himself/herself; between individuals; between Christian themselves; between Christians and brothers and sisters of other faiths; between nations and states, and between developed and less developed areas of the globe. He further explained the social dimension of reconciliation, to overcome class divisions, regional rivalries, unjust discrimination among people based on caste, threats against human dignity and human rights. Thus reconciliation is an important theme for India where people of different cultures, languages, and religions live together. Therefore following Jesus Christ in Indian context would mean for the Christians, the Pope said, to be servants of reconciliation, reconciling individuals among themselves and reconciling ourselves with God.⁴⁷

In his address to the Syrian Orthodox at Kottayam the Pope spoke on the theme of reconciliation stressing that resolving urgent pastoral problems in brotherly and sisterly love and in making progress in our theological dialogues are the surest ways of reconciliation among Christians⁴⁸.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-26

48. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

The Pope also said: "So many problems of social life in India and throughout the world need refinement and purification. Individuals and groups need healing and reconciliation. The Pope clarified that reconciliation is a profound experience of a human person and hence he proclaimed the message of reconciliation to all Indians saying: "Ignorance and prejudice must be replaced by tolerance and understanding. Indifference and class struggle must be turned into brotherhood and committed service."⁴⁹

5. 6. *Justice and Peace*

While praying for peace, the Pope announced peace as a gift from God. The Pope said that it is God's plan for us that all of us "grow together in mutual acceptance, harmony and peace"⁵⁰ and be responsible collaborators in owning the resources of the earth in trusteeship and using them for the growth of all peoples of the world. In partnership with God it is possible for the humans to achieve 'a culture without violence' based on a 'world-wide civilization of truth, love and peace'⁵¹. *Satyagraha*, the truth force or the power of truth enables us "to recognize with Mahatma Gandhi *"the dignity, equality and fraternal solidarity of all human beings, and it prompts us to reject every form of discrimination"*⁵².

In one of his speeches the Pope said that: "The right path to a world community in which justice and peace will reign without frontiers among all peoples and on all continents is the path of solidarity, dialogue and universal brotherhood."⁵³

5. 7. *Salvation and Liberation*

The Pope proclaimed that Jesus came to the world to bring us all salvation. He saved us through his suffering, death and resurrection. And the Pope pointed out: "All human work, no matter how insignificant it may seem, shares in this work of salvation."⁵⁴

The Pope preached that it is the Cross of Christ that has brought us salvation and freedom, a freedom that calls for freedom from all that binds us under sin.⁵⁵ And in his speech given to the representatives of religious, cultural, social and economic and political life of India in New Delhi, he said: "The true liberation of man will only be brought about, as also the elimination of all that militates against human dignity, when the spiritual vision of man is held in honour and pursued. Only within this

49. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

framework can the world adequately face the many problems of justice, peace and integral human development that call for urgent solutions.”⁵⁶

6. Conclusion: An incurable Optimist

Pope John Paul II was an incurable optimist and he shared his optimism with all the listeners that a new world order of peace, justice and love is possible. This possibility has to begin from every human heart, because conversion of heart leads to transformation of a society. The Pope calls Mahatma Gandhi, who worked for freedom from oppression and the transformation of Indian society, the light of India hero of humanity and apostle of non-violence⁵⁷.

In his address to the leaders of other religions in Madras, the Pope proclaimed the global responsibility of religions: “As followers of different religions we should join together in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood/(sisterhood) education, culture, social welfare and civic order.” In realizing these projects together the religions can show that another world is possible where we are lovingly responsible for our neighbour.

In his address to the representatives of the cultural and academic world and of other religions at Calcutta, the Pope shared his positive vision of a new civilization that “is struggling to be born: a civilization of justice and peace in which there will be ample room for legitimate differences, and in which disputes will be settled through enlightened dialogue, not through confrontation”⁵⁸. India has many things to share with the world, specially presenting “a noble spiritual vision of man, a pilgrim of the Absolute, travelling towards a goal, seeking the face of God”⁵⁹. In his well wishes the Pope said to the Christians in India:

As followers of Christ, you are called to be the light of Christ here in India and with Christ to transform the world.... In this great nation, against the background of the ancient heritage of India, I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to *accept these words* that Christ speaks to you today, just as he once spoke to his first listeners and disciples: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5: 16).⁶⁰

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56. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

59. *Ibid.*, 46.

60. *Ibid.*, 55.